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SELECTIONS IN PROSE AND VERSE
FROM WORKS BY THE AUTHOR OF
'WEE MACGREEGOR,' 'OH! CHRISTINA!'
&c. &c.

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TO

JAMES LINDSAY

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J. J. B.

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The J. J. Bell Reciter.

OARIN'.

(From *Wee Macgreegor*).

'CAN I get oarin', Paw?' said Macgregor from the stern, where he was sitting beside his mother and little sister.

'Dod, ay; ye'll get oarin',' replied his father, who was rowing leisurely and enjoying his pipe.

'Na; ye canna get oarin',' exclaimed Lizzie.

'Whit wey, Maw?'

'Aw, the wean's fine,' said John. 'If he wants to get oarin', let him.'

'Macgreegor maun bide whaur he is,' returned Lizzie. 'Near a' the accidents i' the papers comes o' folk changin' their sates. An' ye ken fine, John, I wudna ha'e come wi' ye the day if ye hadna promised there wud be nae cairry-ons in the boat.'

'Och, ye're awfu' easy frichtit,' remarked her husband good-humouredly.

'Ay; I'm easy frichtit. Whit wud I dae wi' wee Jeannie, if the boat was capsizin'? I'm for nae wattery graves, thenk ye, John.'

'I want to get oarin', Maw.'

'Michty me! Can ye no' tak' a tellin', laddie? See the yatts thonder! See thon big yin wi' the yella lum!'

'It's no' a lum; it's a funnel,' returned Macgregor coldly.

'Aweel, it's a' yin,' said his mother agreeably. 'See thon steamboat comin' to the pier! Whit a reek! It's got yella lums—funnels.'

'I like rid funnels better nor yella yins. Can I get oarin' noo, Maw?'

'Tits, Macgreegor! I wunner at ye gaun on aboot oarin' when I've tell't ye ye canna get oarin'. A fine job it wud be if ye coupit the boat an' a whale got the haud o' ye!'

'There's nae whales at Rothesay. Granpaw said there was nane, an' he kens.'

'Aweel,' said Lizzie, 'there's maybe nae whales as a rule, but nae man kens whit's in the sea, as Solyman says.'

'Whales is feart for folk,' observed her son.

'The whale wasna feart for puir Jonah.'

'If I had been Jonah——'

'Ye wud jist ha'e been ett up for forty days and forty nichts.'

'I wud ha'e jaggit it wi' knifes an' preens till it let me oot.'

John laughed loudly, and Lizzie said reprovingly, 'Ye shouldna lauch when Macgreegor says sic daft-like things. Ye jist encourage him wi' his blethers an' boastin'.—Macgreegor, I tell ye, if ye was in the whale's inside ye wud jist be roarin' an' greetin' for yer maw.'

'Was Jonah roarin' an' greetin' for his maw, Maw?'

'Ach, haud yer tongue. See thon wee boat wi' the sail!'

'Whit wey has this boat no' got a sail, Maw?'

'It's got nae mast, ye see, Macgreegor,' said his father.

'Whit wey has it got nae mast, Paw?'

'Weel, ma mannie, it's jist a boat for oarin'.'

'Can I get oarin' noo?'

'I'm sure I've tell't ye a dizzen times ye canna,' cried his mother, who was engaged in fixing a fresh bit of paper to the end of wee Jeannie's barley-sugar.

'When 'll I get oarin'?'

'No' the noo, onywey.'

'Wull I get oarin' in a wee whiley, Maw?'

'Ye'll no' get oarin' the day, sae ye needna be——'

'Wull I get oarin' the morn, Maw?'

'Oh, my! Was there ever sic a wean? 'Deed, Macgreegor, ye wud spile the patience o' Job! Whit are you wantin' to oar for?'

'I jist want to oar."

'Let him oar, Lizzie,' said John mildly.

'Na, I'll no' let him oar. An' I think ye micht ha'e mair sense nor to say, "Let him oar," when I've tell't him fifty times he canna get oarin'.'

For nearly two minutes there was peace.

Then, 'Ma fit's sleepin'!' exclaimed the boy; 'it's awfu' jaggy.'

'Puir laddie,' said his father. 'It's a nesty thing, a sleepin' fit. Is't no', Lizzie?'

'Ay, I mind I wance had it in the kirk, an' I was near dementit.—Is't no' gettin' better, Macgreegor?'

'Naw; it's gettin' waur. A' ma leg's jaggy noo.'

'Lizzie,' said John suddenly, 'if the wean was gettin' oarin' for a wee, dae ye no' think it wud help him?'

'Na, na. I canna thole folk movin' aboot in boats. There 's folk droondit every day jist wi' changin' their sates.'

'I could *creep* to the ither sate, Maw,' said Macgregor, who had suddenly ceased rubbing, dunting, and waggling.

'He 's ower wee,' objected Lizzie.

'I 'm no', Maw. Wullie Thomson's wee-er nor me, an' he aye gets oarin'.'

'Is yer fit better?'

'Naw,' said her son, hastily resuming operations. 'Wullie Thomson's aunt lets him oar.'

'I suppose ye wud suner ha'e Wullie's aunt nor yer ain maw.'

Apparently he did not hear.

'D 'ye hear whit yer maw 's sayin', Macgreegor?' said John. 'She 's speirin' if ye wud like Miss Thomson for yer maw instead o' hersel'.'

'Nae fears,' said Macgregor promptly. 'I like ma ain maw best. Can I get oarin' noo?'

'Ye 're an awfu' laddie,' sighed Lizzie. 'Wull ye be rale canny if I let ye get oarin'?'

'FRIEN' BILL.'

OLD Bob comes down, as usual, an' hangs about the quay,
An' after half-an-hour or so he comes to Bill an' me,
An' says, 'Good luck to you, frien' Bill! an' is there any word,
This fine an' blessed mornin', o' the schooner *Hummin' Bird?*'

'Why, no,' says Bill, as usual, without a wink at me;
'But, bless your eyes, old Bob,' he says, 'however could there be?
The *Hummin' Bird* is but a ship, an' not a shootin' star,
An' likewise most distinc'ly not a blasted motor-car!'

Oh, Bill, he has the language for to make things nice an' clear!
'Don't fret, old Bob,' he also says, ''tis far too soon to hear.'
Then Bob he nods an' grins an' says, 'O' course, that 's wot I meant,'
An' walks away, as usual, most happy an content.

An' now 'tis more 'n twelve month since
the *Hummin' Bird* went down
Wi' thirteen souls, which did include the
skipper, Robert Brown.
For Robert Brown as Captain Brown the
v'y'ge was number one,
An' Robert Brown, I 'm vexed to say, was
old Bob's only son.

An' old Bob's wife she took an' died the
hour the news was known—
'Twas rather rough on poor old Bob to
leave him all alone.
Old Bob was powerful bad at first — we
thought him goin' too—
Till one fine mornin' up he gets as brisk as
me or you.

His step was light, his eye was bright, he
had no tears to weep—
The doctor said his mind was in a sort o'
silly sleep.
An' every mornin' since that day he 's come
about the quay,
Wi' nods for all, but never speech for none
'cept Bill an' me.

Oh, everybody's mighty vexed for poor old
Bob. . . . But, still,
I often thinks 'tis time that one or two was
vexed for Bill.
For Bill's a wicked, lazy swab, a walkin'
cask o' beer—
Leastwise Bob always called him so afore
his mind went queer.

TEA AT AUNT PURDIE'S.

(From *Wee Macgreegor.*)

THE Robinson family was ascending the stair to Aunt Purdie's abode, and the anxious Lizzie was administering a final admonition to her son.

'Noo, Macgreegor, ye're no' to affront me. Yer Aunt Purdie's rale genteel, an' awfu' easy offendit.'

'Wull I get a tert at Aunt Purdie's?' inquired Macgregor.

'Ye'll see whit ye'll get when ye get it. An', mind, Macgreegor, ye're no' to be askin' for jeelly till ye've ett twa slices o' breid an' butter. It's no mainners, an' yer Aunt Purdie's rale parteec'lar. An' yer no' to dicht yer mooth wi' yer cuff—mind that!

An' yer no' to scale yer tea nor sup the sugar, if ony's left in yer cup when ye're dune drinkin'. An' if ye drap yer piece on the floor, ye're no' to gang efter it; ye're jist to let on ye've ett it. An' ye're no'——'

'Deed, Lizzie,' Mr Robinson interposed, 'ye're the yin to think aboot things.' And he rang the bell — otherwise the lecture might still be going on.

'Will you please step in?' said a small, rosy-cheeked maid.

'Dicht yer feet, Macgreegor,' said Lizzie in a quick, loud whisper. 'See, dicht them on the bass.'

Macgregor obeyed with great vigour, and followed the others into the lobby. 'Paw, we've a brawer nock nor that yin,' he remarked in a husky undertone, pointing at a grandfather's clock in a corner.

'Whisht!' said his mother.

Just then Mrs Purdie appeared and bade them welcome, and presently they were gathered in the parlour, the table of which was already laid for tea. Mr Purdie was getting on in the world—his grocery establishment was gaining new customers daily—and Mrs Purdie was inclined, alas! to look down on her homely relatives, and to regard

their manners and speech as vulgar, with the result that her own manners were frequently affected, while her speech was sometimes a strange mixture. 'And how are you to-day, Macgregor?' she asked the boy as they sat round the table.

'I'm fine,' replied Macgregor, glancing at the good things.

'Fine what?'

Lizzie gave her son a nudge, and whispered, 'Ye should say, "Fine, thenk ye."'

'Fine, thenk ye,' said Macgregor obediently. 'I was at the Zoo.'

'Oh, indeed. And what did you see at the Zoo?'

'Beasts, thenk ye.'

'An' hoo 's Rubbert?' asked Lizzie hastily.

'Robert is keeping well, thank you, but he's sorry he cannot leave the shope this evening. His young man was unfortunately rin over by a caur yesterday.'

'Oh, thae caurs!' said Lizzie. 'I'm aye feart for Macgreegor gettin' catched, an' comin' hame wantin' a leg.'

'Nae fears!' said Macgregor, digging into a dish of jam. By some mischance he had already dropped two pieces of plain bread and butter on the floor, but to his credit it must be recorded that he had remembered

his mother's injunction not to attempt to recover them.

'Assist yourself to a cookie, Mr Robison,' said Mrs Purdie, 'and pass your cup.—Mrs Robison, is your tea out?'

'Thenk ye,' said Lizzie. 'This is rale nice cake, Mrs Purdie.'

'It was recommended to me by Mrs M'Cluny, the doctor's wife. Mrs M'Cluny is very highly connected, quite autocratic, in fac'. Her and me is great friends. I expect to meet her at the Carmunnock conversonie on Monday night—a very selec' getherin'—gathering. Her an' me——'

'Paw, see's a curran' cake,' said Macgregor in a whisper.

John winked at his son, and stealthily moved the dish of dainties in his direction. The plate came nearer and nearer, and at last Macgregor's eager paw went cautiously towards it. His mother detected him. 'Macgreegor!'

The hapless youngster started guiltily. Over went the jam-pot, spreading its contents on the cloth; over went Macgregor's teacup, to be smashed to atoms on the floor. Wee Jeannie, with a gurgle of delight, evidently under the impression that something in the way of entertainment was

expected of her, tipped her mug after the cup, while her father, rising in confusion, sent a plate and five cookies to swell the wreckage.

John stood helpless; Lizzie sat speechless and pale; wee Jeannie, discovering that it wasn't a joke after all, set up a dismal wailing; and Macgregor, with quivering lip and misty eye, stared at the ruin he had wrought. No one dared to look at Aunt Purdie. Her expression was grim — very grim indeed. The hour following tea was an uncomfortable one, and John did not conceal his relief at being out of the house.

Poor Lizzie was past speech. It had been a 'sair affront.'

Macgregor drew something from his pocket. 'Is ony o' you yins,' he said pleasantly, 'for a taste o' curran' cake?'

THE GHOST SHIP.

THERE'S always a ship comes into the Clyde
On the grim last night o' the year,
Whatever the wind, whatever the tide,
And whether it's thick or clear.

There's nought can keep her away from
the Clyde
On the grim last night o' the year.

There's always a man steals down to the
quay
When the year's last hour is nigh:
A man in a fine fur coat is he,
Wi' a gold-rimmed glass to his eye.
There's nought can keep him away from
the quay
When the year's last hour is nigh.

He stands and peers till he catches sight
O' the ship he knows right well;
And his brow grows wet, and his face turns
white
And sad as a soul's in hell.
'Tis strange to be sickened and sad at the
sight
O' a ship one knows right well!

But the ship moves on to the Tail o' the
Bank,
And her sails in silence fall,
And her anchor drops wi' never a clank
And never a bosun's call.

Oh, there's never a sound from the Tail o' the Bank
Till the skipper his song doth bawl:

'We're all drowned men on a foundered ship!—
Who was her owner? Who?—
A rotten old shell, as dry as a well,
An' painted to look like new.
We sailed away upon Hogmanay
Of eighteen-seventy-three;
We sailed away on our last long trip,
As somebody wished it to be.
An' down she went like a blasted sieve—
Insured for a fortune, too!
Oh, we're all drowned men on a foundered ship!
And—who is her owner? Who?'

There's always a ship comes into the Clyde
On the grim last night o' the year;
And a rich old man at the dark quay-side
Is shaky and sick wi' fear. . . .
How long will that ship come into the Clyde
On the grim last night o' the year?

THE NEW HAT.

(From *Wee Macgreegor.*)

'MACGREEGOR, ha'e ye washed yer face?'

'Ay, Maw.'

'Weel, bring ower the brush till I pit yer hair stracht. Staun' still noo! Tits, laddie! hoo can I mak' a shed when ye're wagglin' yer heid? . . . There, noo! . . . Let me see yer haun's. Did ye wash them?'

'Ay, Maw.'

'Awa' an' wash them again. An' tie yer lace. Here, John, keep yer e'e on wee Jeannie till I get Macgreegor's new hat.' Lizzie dived under the bed, opened a box, and brought out a parcel.

'Whit kin' o' hat's that?' inquired her husband.

'Wait an' ye'll see,' returned Lizzie, smiling as she undid the paper. 'The man said it wis an Alpine hat, an' vera smairt. Macgreegor's needin' a new hat. His glengarey's gettin' kin' o' shabby for the Sawbath, sae he'll wear it every day, an' ha'e this yin for his guid yin. See? There the hat, John. It'll be a fine surprise for

Macgreegor.—Here, Macgreegor, come an' try on yer new hat.'

'It's a queer-like hat for a wean,' remarked John. 'It's liker a auld man's. Dod, it's jist like auld Mackinky's—him that used to write til the newspapers efter he gaed mad. A Macalpine hat, did ye say? Macgreegor, let's see ye in yer Macalpine hat!'

But Macgregor, who had been gazing dumbly at the headgear, suddenly exclaimed, 'I'll no' wear that thing!'

'Noo ye've done it!' said Lizzie in a sharp undertone to her husband. 'Ye've pit the wean aff it wi' yer stupid talk.—Macgreegor, ma mannie,' she said to the boy, 'yer paw wis jist jokin'. See, pit on yer braw new hat, an' then ye'll gang to the baun'.'

'I'll no' wear it,' said her son, retreating a step. 'I want my greengarey bunnet.'

'Ah, but this yin's faur nicer nor yer glengarey.—Is't no'?' she demanded of John, giving him a warning glance.

'Aw, it's no' a bad hat,' he replied evasively. Then, feeling that he was failing in his duty, he said, 'Come awa', Macgreegor, an' dae whit yer maw bids ye.'

'I'll no' wear it,' said Macgregor stolidly.

'Ye'll no', wull ye no'?' exclaimed Lizzie. 'If ye'll no', ye'll jist!' And taking the boy by the arm, she gently but firmly placed the hat upon his head.

At this indignity tears sprang to his eyes; but he cuffed them away, and stood before his parents, a rather sulky little figure.

'It's the brawest hat he ever had,' said Lizzie, regarding her purchase with intense satisfaction. 'Is't no', John?'

'Ay; it's a gey braw hat,' replied John, with feeble enthusiasm. 'Dae ye think it fits him, though?' he inquired, with sudden hope.

'Fits him? It's like as if his heid had been made for't! Is it no' rale comfortable, Macgreegor?'

'I dinna like it,' replied the boy. 'I like ma greengarey.'

'Och, ye'll sune get to like it, dearie. Ye micht gang to see the king wi' a hat like that on yer heid. Noo, awa' wi' yer paw to the baun', an' be a guid laddie, an' ye'll get something nice to yer tea.'

'Come on, Macgreegor,' said John, holding out his hand. 'You an' me'll ha'e a hurl on the caur, an maybe ye'll fin' oot whit I've got in my pooch.'

Lizzie nodded pleasantly as they de-

parted, and John looked back and smiled, while Macgregor, though subdued, was apparently becoming reconciled to his novel headgear. During the car journey the twain were perhaps less talkative than usual, but by the time they reached the park where the band was playing, John had ceased casting covert glances at the boy's head, and Macgregor, with a portion of 'taiblet' in each cheek, was himself again.

Macgregor greatly enjoyed the loud and lively passages in the music, but he was inclined to be rather impatient while the conductor waved his baton slowly and the instrumentalists played softly, or were partly silent.

'Paw, whit wey is thon man no' blawin' his trumpet?'

'I couldna say, Macgreegor.'

'If I had a trumpet I wud aye blaw it. I wud blaw it hard, tae!'

John was about to assure his son that he fully believed him, when he heard some one behind say, 'Jist luk at that, Mrs Forgie! Is that no' an awfu' daft-like hat to pit on a laddie?'

'It is that, Mrs Bawr. I wudna let a laddie o' mine gang oot in a thing like that for a' the gold o' Crusoes.'

John's ears tingled, and he nearly bit the end off his pipe. 'Macgreegor, I think we 'll gang roun' an' see the drummer,' he said.

'Naw, I want to see thon man blaw his trumpet,' said Macgregor, who, fortunately, had not heard his critics.

'Some folk,' observed Mrs Bawr, 'is gey fond o' tryin' to be gentry.'

'Ye 're richt there,' assented Mrs Forgie, with a sniff. 'I 'm aye sorry for weans that gets drest up like waux works, jist for to please their silly faythers an' mithers.'

'Macgreegor,' said John, 'I 'm no' gaun to wait for the man to blaw his trumpet. I doot he jist cairries it for show. Come awa' wi' me.' And, much to his astonishment, the youngster was dragged away.

From that moment John's pleasure was at an end. Every smile he observed, every laugh he heard, seemed to have a personal application. Before the band performance was finished he and his son were on their way home, himself in mortal terror lest the boy should suffer insult. His worst fears were soon realised.

On the roof of the car Macgregor was chattering gaily, when a semi-intoxicated party inquired with a leer if he were aware that his hat was bashed. Macgregor shrunk

close to his father, whose wrath all but boiled over, and was very subdued for the rest of the journey.

As they walked along the street they were met by two small boys, who grinned at their approach, and laughed loudly behind their backs. John gripped the small fingers a thought closer, but held his peace.

Presently a juvenile voice behind them yelled, 'Wha dee'd an' left ye the hat?' and another exclaimed, 'Gentry pup!'

'Never heed, Macgreegor,' whispered John.

'I—I 'm no' heedin', Paw,' was the tremulous reply.

Three little girls passed them, and broke into a combined fit of giggling. One cried, 'Granpaw!' after them, and the trio ran up a close.

But they were nearly home now, and surely the torment was at an end. Ah, no! At the corner of the street appeared Willie Thomson and several others of Macgregor's playmates. They did not mean to be unkind, but at the sight of their little friend they stared for a moment, and then fled cackling. And from a window above came a jeering hail, 'Haw, you wi' the fancy hat!' followed by the impertinent

exhortation, 'Come oot the hat an' let's see yer feet!' Finally, as they hurried into the familiar entry, a shout came after them, in which the word 'gentry' was cruelly distinct. Climbing the stairs, John wiped the perspiration of shame and wrath from his forehead, while his son emitted strange, half-choked sounds.

'Never heed, Macgreegor, never heed,' answered John, patting the heaving shoulders. 'Ye'll no' wear it again, if I've to buy ye a dizzen hats.'

They entered the house.

'Ye're early back,' said Lizzie cheerfully.

'Ay, we're early back,' said her husband, in a voice she was not familiar with.

'Mercy me! Whit's ado?' she cried. 'Whit ails ye, Macgreegor?'

For a moment there was dead silence. Then Macgregor dashed his new hat on the floor. 'I'll no' wear it! I'll no' wear it! I winna be gentry! I winna be gentry!' he moaned, and rushed from the house, sobbing as if his heart would break.

'De'il tak' the hat!' said John, and, lifting his foot, he kicked it across the kitchen, over the sink, and out at the open window.

Lizzie stared at her husband in consternation, and wee Jeannie, not knowing what

else to do, started screaming at the top of her voice.

'Ha'e ye gaed daft, John?' gasped Lizzie at last.

'Gey near it,' he replied. 'See, Lizzie,' he continued, 'that hat's to be left in the street, an' ye're no' to say a word aboot it to Macgreegor. Listen!' And he proceeded to supply her with details.

'But it's a bewtiful hat, an' that genteel; an' I peyed——' she began ere he had finished.

'I'm no' carin' whit ye peyed for't. I'd suner loss a week's pey nor see Macgreegor in anither Macalpine hat, or whitever ye ca' it. . . . Aw, Lizzie, if ye had jist seen the wey the laddie tried for to keep frae greetin' when they wis makin' a mock o' him, ye wud——'

'Here, John, haud wee Jeannie,' said Lizzie abruptly. 'I maun see whit's come ower him.—Dinna greet, duckie.—See if ye can keep her quate, John.'

Lizzie was absent for a few minutes, and returned looking miserable. 'I canna see him, John. Ye micht gang doon yersel'. He's maybe hidin' frae me,' she said with a sigh.

'Nae fear o' that, dearie. But he doesna

like folk to see him greetin'. That's why I didna rin efter him at first. But I'll awa' an' see if I can get him noo. An'—an', Lizzie, ye'll no' say onythin' aboot the hat? I'll bring it up, if ye want to keep it.'

'Na. I'll no' say onythin'; but it's a rale braw hat, an' that genteel, an' I doot somebody 's rin aff wi' 't.'

Just then Macgregor walked in, looking rather ashamed of himself, and with the tears scarcely dry. Yet, at the tenderly solicitous expressions of his parents, he smiled as if he had been waiting permission to do so. 'Paw, there a——'

'Gi'e yer maw a kiss,' said John.

'Ye're an awfu' laddie,' murmured Lizzie, cuddling him.

'Paw, there a wee——'

'Wud ye like a curran' cake to yer tea, Macgreegor?' inquired Lizzie, as she released him.

'Ay, Maw,' he answered, beaming. Then, 'Paw, there a wee dug ootbye, an' it's worryin' ma hat, an' pu'in' it a' to bits!'

CHRISTINA AND POETRY.

(From *Oh! Christina!*)

[Christina, a neglected orphan in Glasgow, is adopted by her aunt, a genteel spinster and proprietor of a little fancy-goods shop in Kilmabeg, whose desire is to make a lady of the girl.]

'LISTEN to this, auntie! "Grand Moonlight Cruise to Rothesay Bay, by the North British Company's steamer *Marmion*, on Friday evening, 23rd August (weather permitting). Music on board. Fare, one shilling."'

Christina paused impressively.

'Indeed,' said Miss Purvis absently.

'Ha'e ye ever been a moonlight cruise?'

'Not since I was young.'

'Aboot ma age, eh?'

'Oh, no; not quite so young as you, my dear.'

'It strikes me,' observed Christina gloomily, 'that I'll never be the richt age for enjoyin' masel'. I'm ower young the noo; an' when I'm no' ower young, I'll be ower auld. Oh, what a life!'

'Hush, Christina! You are talking nonsense. There's a time for everything.'

'The time for the evenin' cruise is seeven-twinty.'

'Be quiet! I have been thinking lately that it would be very pleasant if you and I were to read something aloud every evening.'

'Oh, help!' muttered Christina; and more audibly, 'Something lovey-dovey—eh?'

'Christina!' Miss Purvis took a little green volume from the shelf and seated herself. 'I gained this as a prize at school.'

'Punctuality—eh?'

'Good conduct, Christina.'

'Oh, mercy! . . . Is 't poetry?'

'The finest of poetry. That is why it is called "Gems of Poesy."'

Christina sat down and began to whistle softly.

'Hush! Listen to this beautiful poem. It is by William Wordsworth. It is called "We are Seven."' Miss Purvis emitted several delicate coughs.

'Did ye say seeven or seeventy?'

'Seven, Christina. "We are Seven." Now attend:

> '"I met a little cottage girl,
> She was eight years old, she said."'

'Oh, I ken that!' Christina interrupted. 'It was in ma last year's reader. I ken it fine.'

'Then, perhaps, since you know it so well,' said Miss Purvis somewhat snappily, 'you can tell me what comes after the two lines I have just read.'

'Hooch, ay!

'"I met a little cottage girl,
She was eight years old, she said;
She took her little porringer
An' stuck it on her head!"'

And Christina laughed heartily.

Miss Purvis frowned. 'If you are going to make a mock of these beautiful verses, I shall not read another line.'

'Oh! read anither, please, auntie.'

After some hesitation, the spinster began:

'"Oft have I heard of Lucy Gray——"'

'Same here. But fire awa'!'

Miss Purvis shut the book, laid it aside, and resumed her knitting

'I—I didna mean to offend ye. Gi'e's anither chance. I couldna help kennin' aboot the little cottage girl an' that Miss Gray. They were both in ma lesson-book. Read anither, if ye please, auntie. I'll haud ma tongue this time.'

Miss Purvis relaxed from the stiff atti-

tude she had assumed. 'Well, Christina, if you will promise not to interrupt, I might read you "Lord Ullin's Daughter."'

'Was she young or auld?'

'She was young——'

'As young as me?'

'Oh, no; she was a young lady who ran away with her lover——'

'Her lover! Oh, my! Please read it, auntie,' cried Christina, and curling one leg round the other, settled herself to listen.

Miss Purvis read the whole tale without suffering a single interruption, and at its conclusion her niece was pleased to say, 'That's a champion pome, auntie. But what a peety they got droondit, an' what an auld besom the faythe was! I wish ye wud read it again.'

Miss Purvis was delighted. 'I'll tell you what we'll do,' she cried. 'If you can repeat the poem correctly to me by Thursday night, I'll take you to the moonlight cruise on Friday—provided that the weather is very fine. Now, what do you say to that?'

The girl jumped up. 'I'm on!' she shouted, and fell upon her aunt's neck.

She spent the rest of the evening in

studying 'Lord Ullin's Daughter,' and went to bed in a fever of anticipation.

About 3 A.M. Miss Purvis was roused from her slumbers.

'Auntie! Auntie!'

'What is it? Don't you feel well?'

'D'ye think it'll be fine on Friday?'

'Friday? Oh, yes—yes, I hope it will be fine. Go to sleep, dear.'

'I'm thinkin' it'll be a queer suck for me if Friday's wat. I canna unlearn the pome.'

THE APPEAL.

WHY, yes, sir, she *is* like a big fiddle-case,
An' her funnel's ridickelous tall,
An' the state o' her riggin's a blushin' disgrace,
An' her hull's like an old tartan shawl;
An' rumpity-thump goes her cränky old screw,
A-shovin' her on through the sea—
But in spite o' her failin's so strikin' to you,
She sorter appeals to me.

She's the clumsiest, shabbiest craft, I'll allow,
An' she's sailed under more'n one name;
'Tis Norwegian the flag as she's flying just now,
An' she didn't bring other flags fame.
She's not just as old as she looks, sir—they say
She was built in the year 'ninety-three;
But her luck has been shockin' in every way—
Which sorter appeals to me.

She's been in a dozen collisions or so,
An' always come out of 'em wust.
The times she's broke down—well, I'm blowed if I know—
But she oncet had a biler as bust;
An' twice she's gone crazy when enterin' docks,
An' stove in her bows on the quay;
An' thrice she's been stranded—ay, been on the rocks—
Which sorter appeals to me.

But she's not condemned yet, sir! An' sometimes I fears
I'm wuss off than yon shabby old boat;

For there's always some friend, so to speak, as appears
Just in time for to keep *her* afloat. . . .
When we've got on the rocks, sir—Why, yes, sir, 'tis damp,
An'—Thank ye! Don't mind if I do. . . .
There's one close at hand, sir. . . . I thought the old tramp
Might sorter appeal to you.

A LESSON IN GRAMMAR.

(From *Oh! Christina!*)

'CHRISTINA, put that away and attend to me,' said Miss Purvis.

Reluctantly Christina laid aside the novelette. 'Ye should read it, auntie,' she said; 'it's a fair corker—a tale o' love and passion.'

'Hush! This evening I am going to give you a lesson in grammar. It seems to me that grammar is not properly taught nowadays. When I was a girl at school, I got a prize for grammar——'

'They're no' sae free wi' the prizes nooadays.'

Ignoring the remark, Miss Purvis rose with dignity and took from the shelf a slim volume in a poor state of repair. 'This,' she said, reseating herself, 'is my old grammar——'

'Ye 've no' kep' it extra weel, auntie.'

'Never mind that. Now, attend! We shall begin at the very beginning. What is grammar?'

'Ask us anither!'

'Christina!'

'Weel, I dinna ken, an' I 'm no' heedin'.'

'I ask you once more: What is grammar?'

Miss Purvis spoke as sternly as she could, but she looked so much more sad than angry that her niece said respectfully, 'I wish ye wud tell us, auntie.'

'Very well,' said Miss Purvis, opening the book. 'I will tell you, with pleasure. Grammar is—— Grammar is——'

It was unfortunate that the first few pages were missing. Miss Purvis blushed hotly as she suddenly remembered how she had torn them out to enwrap a piece of toffee. How far off her schooldays had seemed until this moment!

'Grammar, Christina, is——'

Not for the life of her could she recollect the definition.

Christina regarded her with sympathetic concern. 'Dinna fash yersel'. It's nae odds to me.'

Miss Purvis passed her hand over her brow, murmuring, 'It's very extraordinary, but I seem to have forgotten the exact words. Grammar is—— No! I cannot recall them.' And she gazed helplessly at the inscription in a very school-girlish hand on the inside of the cover: 'Mary Jane Purvis, 12 Blyth Street, Pilrig, Edinburgh, Midlothian, Scotland, Great Britain, Europe, The World.'

She could not help smiling at her youthful folly, and almost before she knew, Christina was looking over her shoulder.

'Oh, Jamaica!' exclaimed Christina. 'Was't you that drew the funny wee men, auntie?'

'Funny wee men!' Miss Purvis cried in horror, her eyes lighting on several tiny pencil sketches above and below her name and address.

'Here yin wi' bowly legs!' Christina announced; 'an' here anither wi' a curly nose——'

'Christina!'

But Christina was beyond control. 'Wha was Maister McFadyen?'

'Mr McFadyen,' replied Miss Purvis, restraining herself, 'was my most respected master. He taught English and——'

'Fine ham! He's the bowly-leggit yin, an' ye've wrote ablow him, "Mr McFadyen is a pig!" My! but it's you for the comic!'

Miss Purvis rose, trembling. 'Christina, give me the book at once.'

The girl looked at her aunt. 'I didna mean to vex ye, auntie.'

'Christina,' continued Miss Purvis, her anger evaporating at once. 'I'm thinking of doing some tidying-up in the shop before bed-time. Would you like to help me?'

'Fine!'

'And,' added Miss Purvis, with an effort, 'we'll begin our grammar lesson in earnest next Monday.'

'Nae hurry,' said Christina cheerfully. Then she took her aunt confidentially by the arm. 'But, auntie, between you and me and the jawbox, did *you* no' think grammar lessons was rubbish when *you* was at the schule?'

'Were,' corrected Miss Purvis. 'Grammar lessons were rubbish, Christina.'

'Hurray!' cried Christina. 'It's you for the comic!'

MRS McLEERIE'S COUNTRY VISIT.

(From *Mrs McLeerie.*)

'WEEL, ye've got back.' Mrs Munro, seating herself at her old friend's table, took the cup of tea presented to her.

'Ay, I've got back,' returned Mrs McLeerie, who had been spending nearly a week with her sister-in-law in the country, and whose wrinkled visage wore an unaccustomed rosiness.

Mrs Munro poured some tea into her saucer, and took a mouthful of the scalding liquid. 'Ye're lukin' rale weel, Mistress McLeerie,' she observed presently.

'I canna help that, Mistress Munro.'

'Did ye no' enjoy yersel'?'

Mrs McLeerie drew a long breath. 'Mind,' she said, 'I'm no' sayin' onythin' agin ma guid-sister, Mistress McCorkindale.'

Mrs Munro nodded reassuringly. 'She would meet ye at the station, I suppose?'

'Her man did.'

'Oh, indeed!'

'Ay! Wi' yin o' yon machines that's a' wheels an' nae sates—a jig, he ca'ed it.'

'Ye mean a gig.'

'It was liker a jig to me. I was near shooken to bits when we got to the fairm.'

'But yer troubles wud be ower then, Mistress McLeerie.'

'Ye micht think that, Mistress Munro; ye micht think that. I thocht that masel' —at first.'

'But whit gaed wrang? Was Mistress McCorkindale no' rale kind and pleesant?'

'I'm no' sayin' onythin' agin my guid-sister, Mistress McCorkindale. Mind that! But whit think ye I got for ma supper?'

'Whit did she gi'e ye?'

'A biled egg an' a—a cup o' co-*co*-a!'

'Co-*co*-a?'

'That's whit I got,' said Mrs McLeerie. 'Ay, an' that's the only drink I got a' the time I was awa'—CO-*CO*-A!'

'CO-*CO*-A?'

'Jist CO-*CO*-A! Mistress McCorkindale said it was the only drink that wasna entirely deleerious. And then——'

'A' the same,' interposed Mrs Munro, 'ye wud ha'e a fine healthy life at the fairm.'

'Mphm!'

'Ye wud get the mulk warm frae the coo?'

'I prefer it cauld frae the cairt.'

'An' ye wud get eggs new laid.'

'Fresh is guid enough for me.'

'Ay; but it maun be fine to sit doon to yer breakfast, kennin' the eggs was laid that vera mornin'!'

'Maybe. It's no' vera fine hearin' them bein' laid at three o'clock i' the mornin'.'

'Tits! Ye couldna hear an egg bein' laid, Mistress McLeerie!'

'Could I no'? I tell ye, Mistress Munro, I heard the beasts cryin' "Cock-a-leerie-law" every mornin'—ay, even on the Sawbath!'

'Och! That wud be the cocks.'

'Aweel, it's a' yin.'

'But ye wud ha'e some nice walks through the day, Mistress McLeerie.'

'Wan—I didna get faur.'

Mrs Munro looked inquiringly at her friend.

After a silence, Mrs McLeerie said impressively. 'It was a goat.'

'A whit?'

'A goat—a wild goat.'

'Mercy me! Did it dunch ye?'

'It tried it. Ay, an' it chased me for near a mile. I thocht I was dune for.'

'But did ye no' try to frichten it awa'? Did ye no' turn roon' an' face it?'

'Face it, Mistress Munro! If ye had seen thon awfu' beast loupin' aboot like mad an'

tryin' to bore holes in ye wi' its frichtsome horns, ye wudna be talkin' aboot facin' it. Face it? Ma certy! I wud as sune face a ragin', roarin' lion!'

'But ye escaped, Mistress McLeerie.'

'I escaped, as ye say, Mistress Munro—an' nae mair. When I won back to the fairm I sank doon on the doorstep an' thocht I wud never get ma breith again.'

'Dearie me! Did Mistress McCorkindale no' gi'e ye onything to help ye—a wee taste speerits? Eh?'

'She gi'ed me co-*co*-a, an'—an' I wud ha'e gi'ed five shillin's for a dish o' tea.'

'Oh, dear, dear! That was atrocious!'

'But, mind ye, Mistress Munro, I never said I didna enjoy masel'.'

SOULS OF THE SHIPS.

ONE afternoon when the sun was hot,
I takes a snooze on the quay;
An' a kink in my neck I must ha' got,
For a nightmare comes to me—
A horrible nightmare, too, my lad,
As never goes right away,
For I sometimes thinks as I really had
A vision o' Judgment Day.

Ay, the Lord was judgin' the world at last—
But I had been left to sleep,
Till, all o' a sudden, I spied aghast
The dead come out o' the deep!
Thousan's an' thousan's o' poor drowned men
An' women an' children too,
Out o' the deep they rose again
As the Angel's Trumpet blew.

An' the Lord God judged them one by one,
But my sight was blinded sore,
An' I hid my face till the trials was done
An' the Trumpet blew once more.
An' then I was made to look, an' lo!
I heard a loud voice say:
'Behold the Ships which the Lord doth know
Was wickedly cast away!'

An' hundreds o' ships rose out o' the sea,
An' high on the waves they rode—
Ships as was strange as strange could be,
An' ships as ye might ha' knowed.
Ho, some was ancient, an' some was new,
But all had been murdered, sure. . . .
Now I'm tellin' ye, lad—an' it's terrible true—
The souls o' such ships endure.

All ships ha' souls; but the souls don't stay
When the days o' the ships is done—
Excep' in the ships as is thrown away:
Oh, there do the souls live on!
They live for to witness afore the Lord—
Be it ever so long a time—
They live to behold His just reward
To them as got rich by crime.

The Lord looked down on a wood-built barque—
A beautiful craft was she!—
An' the Lord cried loud—an' the day grew dark—
'My Ship, who hath murdered thee?'
Then the soul o' the ship spoke up an' cried,
'O Lord, when the wind was fair
I sank in the sea; an' my captain lied,
And the man as got rich stands *there!*'

An' the Lord looked hard in a man's white face,
Till out o' the trimblin' lips
The words come dribblin'—'O God o' Grace,
The fault, the blame was the ship's.'
An' then afore ye could wink an eye
(I told ye that ships ha' souls!),
The barque heels over, wi' one great cry,
Exposin' the *auger holes!*

An' the Trumpet roared like a winter gale,
  An' the soul o' the ship went free. . . .
But they put the man's on the ship to sail
  Wi' Fear on a shoreless sea—
Wi' nothin' but Fear as the ship would sink,
  An' Life, which had growed most dear;
Wi' nothin' to do an' nothin' to think—
  Nothin' but Life an' Fear!

An' I knowed no more. . . . It was good
    to wake
  Beholdin' this blessed quay.
Ay, lad, I was glad when I felt the ache
  O' them groggy old bones o' me.
Ho, laugh if ye like! but I says oncet
    more—
  Carryin' jewels or coals,
Crossin' the ocean or huggin' the shore—
  The ships o' the sea ha' souls!

MRS McLEERIE'S 'TRIAL' TRIP.

[Mrs Munro induces her timid old friend to be her guest on a day's sail from the Broomielaw, on Glasgow's Fair Saturday.]

'I CA' this a perfec' triumph,' said Mrs Munro. 'Fancy twa auld yins like us winnin' on board when hunners is gaun to be left on shore!'

'I 'm gled we 've got a sate,' Mrs McLeerie responded, with an effort at cheerfulness.

'I believe ye!' Mrs Munro threw a defiant glance around. 'An' I warrant ye we 'll stick to it!'

'That 's no unlikely, mistress,' remarked her other neighbour, a good-humoured-looking man. 'I done ma best to attract your attention. Ma laddie gaed to see the ingines stairtin', an' either you or yer frien' is sittin' on his jeelly piece.'

Mrs Munro looked angry till she discovered she was not the victim. Then she said brightly, 'Remove yer compos mentis, Mistress McLeerie, till I see if ye 've won the prize for guid conduc'. . . . Ay, it 's you for the reward o' merit!' she proceeded, tossing the fragments to the gulls. 'But, never heed! Nae great damage! Aipple jeelly 's no' as clingin' as ploom jam. Sit ye doon an' enjoy yersel'.' She turned affably to the man. 'Ma frien' 's supremely obleeged to ye.'

'Weel,' he replied, 'she 's a marvel at concealin' her feelin's.'

The telegraph sounded.

'We 're awa'!' cried Mrs Munro. 'Ten 'oors o' infinitive pleesure afore us! In a few meenutes, Mistress McLeerie, ye 'll obtain a splendid view o' Pertick.'

'Thenk ye,' murmured Mrs McLeerie. She closed her eyes, and during the next ninety minutes opened them only out of courtesy to her friend.

'We are noo aboot to sail up Loch Long,' Mrs Munro announced. 'It 's reputit to be the deepest loch on the testerial globe. They say they 've never reached the bottom.'

'I 'm thinkin' *we* 'll reach the bottom the day,' said Mrs McLeerie. 'There 's faur ower mony folk on this boat.'

Mrs Munro laughed. 'Wud ye like a life-belt?'

'Na, na; I 'll jist droon a nateral death.'

'Havers, Mistress McLeerie! A body wud think ye had never been doon the water afore.'

'I ha'ena been doon since the year nineteen fowerteen.'

'Weel, ye needna speak as if it had been the year wan! Cheer up! Prepare to enjoy yersel'! An' if at first ye don't succeed, try, try, try again! That 's the proper holiday speerit!'

The steamer was certainly well filled, and suddenly a youth begged Mrs Munro's pardon for standing on her foot.

'Oh, not at all!' she replied in her best manner. Then she whispered to her com-

panion, 'An exceedin'ly weel-mainnered young man, that! Apologeesed for stannin' on ma fit—an' he wasna.'

Mrs McLeerie sighed. 'He didna apologeese to me—an' he was. Oh, I dinna like thae croods.'

'Try an' be a little mair sociable. Dinna tell me ye're wishin' ye had gaed wi' yer man to Busby. If the warst comes to the warst, shairly a shippin' disaster is preferable to a railway yin. Noo, kindly spread yersel' oot till I gang an' get oor tickets.'

On her return she brought news. For some time a large whale had been favouring Loch Long with its presence.

'That'll be a gran' sicht for ye, Mistress McLeerie!'

'I dinna like big beasts. I hope it'll no' dunch the boat.'

'Nae fears! But they say that the close sicht o' a whale is as guid as a sermon to them that doesna believe in the prophet Jonah.'

'I've aye believed. I dinna need to see ony whales, thenk ye kindly a' the same.'

'Tits! I didna mean for to raise yer releegious monkey, as it were! But ye'll maybe be gled to hear we're to get fower 'oors ashore at Lochgileheid.'

'If we get there.'

But they got there all right, and after Mrs McLeerie had had several cups of tea, Mrs Munro began to hope that brighter hours were in store. But on her suggesting a visit to the Ardgoil Estate, Mrs McLeerie said, 'Gang yersel', Mistress Munro. I 'm gaun to bide at the pier and watch for the boat comin' back frae Auchterarder.'

'Oh, ye mean Arrochar!'

'Aweel, it 's a' yin. Jist you gang——'

'Na, na. I wouldna leave ye in yer present lubugrious condeetion, Mistress McLeerie. I 'm responsible for the trip, an' I 'll no' desert ye.'

'Aw, ye 're a guid frien' to me, Mistress Munro. I 'm vexed to spile yer day.'

'Oh, but ye 're no' daein' that. I never expectit ye to sing an' dance. Still, I hope ye 'll no' be sae timorous on the hameward voyage.'

'I dinna think I 'll be sae feared. An', ye see, it wasna only jist fear——' Mrs McLeerie stopped short.

Mrs Munro looked hard at her. 'Aha! I was shair ye had something on yer mind, forbye yer latter end! Come awa'! Pit yer trust in me. Ye can rely on me for advice.'

Mrs McLeerie drearily shook her head. 'Ye canna dae onything, Mistress Munro. The prophet Jonah couldna help me.'

'Huh! I wud be gey hard up for advice afore I gaed to a man like him. But jist as ye please, Mistress McLeerie, jist as ye please. If ye canna trust an auld frien' like me—weel, I've nae mair to say.' And Mrs Munro looked just a little huffy.

'Weel, I'll tell ye,' said Mrs McLeerie. 'I—I forgot to turn aff the gas-ring——'

'The gas-ring! Mercy me! I turned it aff when ye was pittin' on yer bonnet.'

MRS McLEERIE AT THE MOVIES.

AS they entered, Mrs McLeerie clutched her companion's arm. 'Aw, Mistress Munro, I dinna like the dark, I dinna like the dark.'

'Tits, dinna be nervous, Mistress McLeerie. Mercy! ye're quakin' like a jeelly on a motor-bike!' To the attendant Mrs Munro said, 'Back sates, if ye please. Ma frien''s afflicted wi' the tremolios.—Come on, Mistress McLeerie. Na, na, ye canna gang

hame. Cheer up! Ye'll be enjoyin' yersel' fine in a meenute.'

With groans, Mrs McLeerie submitted herself to being guided and pushed to the middle of a row.

'Sit ye doon,' said her friend.

Mrs McLeerie sat down.

'Oh, it's merely the topicals,' Mrs Munro remarked, settling herself. 'But ye'll find them quite entertainin'. Are ye comfortable?' . . . Receiving no reply, she turned her head. 'Gosh!'

Of Mrs McLeerie, only her bonnet was visible.

'Oh, dear, dear! I'm vexed I forgot to warn ye aboot the tip-ups. I hope ye're no' damaged. Let me help ye up.'

'Thenk ye, but I'll jist bide whaur I am,' sighed Mrs McLeerie. 'It's safer.'

'But ye canna see onything doon there!'

'Dinna fash yersel' aboot me, Mistress Munro. It's jist a judgment on me for comin' to sic a place.'

However, she was persuaded to rise for the comedy. It was one of those screaming absurdities, full of racings and chasings, misunderstandings and misadventures, and revolvers that fired sixty shots without reloading. For five minutes Mrs Munro

shook and chuckled, then suddenly remembered her friend.

'Oh, Mistress McLeerie, did ye see that?—the wee man firin' a shot an' blawin' off the auld yin's whuskers!'

'Oh, it's terrible, Mistress Munro! Sich savage croolty! Whit'll the man dae wantin' his whuskers—and him the leevin' image o' the elder at the plate last Sawbath?' Mrs McLeerie half rose from her seat. 'Oh dear, oh dear! There's twa o' them shot deid! Whaur's the polis?'

'But it's fun! Ye're supposed to lauch.'

'Lauch—at murder! Oh dear, oh dear!'

'Whisht! whisht! See, there's the heroine!'

'Ah, I dinna like her. She's ower flighty-like.'

The heroine was rowing on a lake. She caught a crab—very gracefully, of course—and the boat upset. Rescuers appeared from all quarters—among them Mrs McLeerie's elder.

'See!' whispered Mrs Munro, 'he's got new whuskers!'

'Wunnerfu' is the works o' nature!' said Mrs McLeerie.

The owner of the whiskers calmly and deliberately divested himself of five coats

and four waistcoats, and, throwing a somersault, plunged into the lake.

A wail rose from Mrs McLeerie. 'He'll get his daith o' cauld——'

'Whisht, whisht! Look at the heroine bein' rescued by a' thae nice young men! See, they've gotten her safe to land, an' nane the waur.'

'But, Mistress Munro, whaur's the elder?'

Mrs Munro was convulsed. 'Thon's him!' she gasped, pointing to a pair of boots protruding from the surface. 'His heid's stuck in the mud! That's the best yet!'

The lights went up, and Mrs McLeerie wiped her eyes.

'Noo,' said Mrs Munro cheerfully, 'we're gaun to ha'e a drama!'

Mrs McLeerie started. 'Aw, thenk ye kindly, Mistress Munro, but ye'll excuse me no' takin' ony.'

'I said "drama," *nut* "dram," Mistress McLeerie. An' noo I earnestly hope ye'll no' tak' offence if I dinna address ye for an 'oor or so. I get that absorbulated in the drama I wudna notice if the roof blew awa'.'

'Does it whiles blaw awa'?'

'Na, na. I was speakin' metapheesically.

Noo, pey attention to the screen an' enjoy yersel'.'

For the space of an hour and a quarter Mrs Munro was lost to the world. When the end came she heaved a great sigh and wiped her plump countenance. 'That was a corker!' she said. 'I never seen a sweeter heroine, nor finer agony. I hope it wasna ower hertrendin' for you, Mistress McLeerie. Was ye greatly affected?'

It is probable that Mrs McLeerie had never in her life told a lie. She could not do it now. Sadly she replied, 'Aw, Mistress Munro, I hope ye'll no' be offendit—but I couldna thole ony mair grief, an' I jist kep' ma e'en shut. Oh, thon puir man wi' his heid in the mud! Whit an end for an elder o' the kirk!'

ON THE QUAY.

I'VE never travelled for more 'n a day,
I never was one to roam,
But I likes to sit on the busy quay,
Watchin' the ships as says to me—
'Always somebody goin' away,
Somebody gettin' home.'

I likes to think that the world's so wide—
'Tis grand to be livin' there,
Takin' a part in its goin's on. . . .
Ah, now, ye're laughin' at poor old John
Talkin' o' works o' the world wi' pride
As if he was doin' his share!

But laugh if ye will! When ye're old as me
Ye'll find 'tis a rare good plan
To look at the world—an' love it too!—
Tho' never a job are ye fit to do. . . .
An' 'tisn't all sorrow an' pain to see
The works o' another man.

'Tis good when the heart grows big at last,
Too big for troubles to fill—
Wi' room for the things that was only stuff
When workin' an' winnin' seemed more 'n enough—
Room for the world, the world so vast,
Wi' its peoples an' all their skill.

That's what I'm thinkin' on all the days
I'm loafin' an' smokin' here.
An' the ships do make me think the most—
(Of readin' in books 'tis little I'd boast),—

Ay, the ships, they carries me long, long ways
An' draws far places near.

I sees the things that a sailor brings,
I hears the stories he tells. . . .
'Tis surely a wonderful world, indeed!
'Tis more 'n the peoples can ever need!
An' I praises the Lord—to myself I sings—
For the world in which I dwells.

An' I loves the ships more every day,
Tho' I never was one to roam.
Oh! the ships is comfortin' sights to see,
An' they means a lot when they says to me—
'Always somebody goin' away,
Somebody gettin' home.'

JIMSIE.

(From *Mr Pennycook's Boy.*)

IT was Friday afternoon, and on Friday afternoons Mrs McLeerie always cleaned the glass case containing her beloved stuffed birds—that is, cleaned it inside as well as out, for, of course, it received an outward

dusting daily along with the other contents of the parlour.

She was engaged in gently brushing the gaudiest inmate of the case, smiling happily as she did so, when a tapping at the outer door startled her.

'Wha can that be?'

The tapping was repeated.

'I suppose I best gang an' see.' She left the room with a regretful glance at her birds.

Opening the door, she beheld a small boy, who might have been seven or eight years old, the possessor of a plump countenance bearing a charmingly innocent expression. Some brownish stains at the corners of his mouth might have been excused, so tidy was his appearance otherwise.

'Was it you that was chappin', laddie?' asked Mrs McLeerie, her irritation vanishing.

'Ay.'

'An' whit micht ye be wantin'?'

'Ma auntie.'

'But I'm no' yer auntie,' she said, smiling kindly.

'I ken ye're no' ma auntie. Ma auntie bides up the stair; but an auld wife said she was awa', an' I cam to speir if you kent onything aboot her——'

'Oh, it 's Miss Colquhoun that 's yer auntie! She gaed awa' on Wensday doon the watter. It was jist the ither day she was tellin' me she had nae ludgers, an' it was cheaper bidin' wi' freen's nor in her ain hoose—a sayin' that 's as true as ony o' Solyman's.'

'Is ma auntie awa' doon the watter?' interrupted the youngster, anxiety in his voice.

'That 's jist whit I 'm tellin' ye. . . . But whit dae they ca' ye, dearie?'

'Jimsie Danks.'

'An' whaur dae ye bide?'

'Twinty-seeven McTurk Street.'

'Whaur 's that?'

'It 's on the Sooth Side.'

'Mercy me! That 's a lang road! Hoo did ye get ower here?'

'Ma maw pit me in the caur an' tell't the gaird to pit me oot at the fit o' the street, an' I kent the road efter that. But I—I wish ma auntie was hame. Oh! Oh!'

'Dinna greet, dearie,' said Mrs McLeerie, deeply touched. 'An' hoo was ye gaun to get hame again?'

'In the caur. Ma maw gi'ed me a penny, but I—I lost it. . . . I thocht I wud get anither frae ma—ma auntie.'

'Whaur lost ye yer penny?'

'In—a—a—in a—sweetie shope.'

'Aw, ye shouldna ha'e spent yer caur-penny on sweeties,' said Mrs McLeerie gravely. 'Are ye hungry?'

'Ay.'

'Weel, come ben, an' I'll gi'e ye a piece, Rubbert.'

'I'm no' Rubbert! I'm Jimsie,' he said indignantly. But he entered the house willingly enough.

'Deed, I'm [illegible] ye Rubbert when yer name's Jimsie,' she said apologetically, 'but I'm that bad at mindin' names. I'm aye confusin' the toon councillors wi' the prophets o' the Auld Testament. . . . Come ben the hoose, Jimsie, . . . into the parlour, Jimsie. Sit doon on thon chair, Jimsie.'

Jimsie, remembering his manners, said, 'Thenk ye, mistress,' and took the chair indicated.

'Wud ye tak' a ham sangwidge or a jeelly piece?' inquired his hostess kindly.

'Ay, I could tak' a sangwidge and a jeelly piece, mistress.'

Mrs McLeerie smiled and went to the kitchen to prepare the feast. On her return she discovered her guest beside the stuffed

birds, staring at them with all a boy's curiosity.

'Dinna tich the birds, dearie,' she said uneasily. 'I wudna like them to get hurtit.'

'They 're no' leevin'.'

'Weel, they 're no' exactly leevin', Wullie, but——'

'I 'm no' Wullie! I 'm——'

'Aw, I intendit for to say Peter——'

'I 'm Jimsie.'

'Aweel, Jimsie, never heed the birds the noo. Come an' ha'e yer bit sangwidge an' jeelly piece.'

When the sandwich and most of the bread and jelly had disappeared, he turned to her, and, with his mouth full, observed, 'Whit wey dae ye keep deid birds, mistress?'

'Deid!' exclaimed Mrs McLeerie, as if she had received a shock.

'They canna cheep.'

'Ah, but they could cheep when they was fleein' aboot in furrin pairts.'

'Wud they no' cheep noo, if ye was squeezin' them or jaggin' them wi' a preen?'

'Mercy on us! Ye maunna say sic things, Erchie—I mean Jimsie.'

'Thon wee bew yin 's got awfu' queer e'en. Ye can pick them oot an' pit them back.'

Mrs McLeerie nearly fainted with horror, but her visitor evidently thought she was merely astonished at his discovery, for he proceeded to explain his experience during her absence in the kitchen.

'I couldna get the e'en oot the biggest yin, but I got them oot the wee bew yin as easy as onything. The wee bew yin lukit unco funny wantin' its e'en. Ye should try pickin' the e'en oot the ither yins, mistress. It's fine fun!'

'Whisht, whisht! . . . Oh me, the day!' Mrs McLeerie rushed to her birds.

Jimsie crammed the last of his jelly piece into his mouth and followed her.

As far as Mrs McLeerie could see, there was no damage done. At the same time she felt she would like to get the youngster out of the house.

'Maybe it's time ye was gaun hame noo,' she said gently.

'Och, I'm in nae hurry.'

'Weel, I'll gi'e ye a penny for the caur, for, ye see, I've to get ready for ma man comin' hame to his tea.'

'I'm no' heedin' aboot yer man. He winna eat me.'

'Ay, ay,' said his hostess pleasantly, as she patted his head. 'But yer mither'll be

wearyin' for ye. . . . An' I 'll gi'e ye anither penny to buy sweeties to taste yer gab on the road hame. Whaur 's yer bunnet, dearie? Aw, there it is, on the easy-chair. . . . Jist bide a meenute till I get ye yer tippence. An' dinna tich the birds, dearie.'

She hurried from the room, and on her return, a couple of minutes later, found the boy sitting demurely on the edge of the horse-hair sofa.

'Here yer tippence,' she said, 'an' be shair an' gang stracht hame. Are ye shair ye ken the richt caur?' she asked, as she led him to the door.

'Ay, fine.'

'Weel, dicht the jeelly aff yer mooth, like a guid laddie, an' tell yer maw that Mistress McLeerie, wha kens yer auntie, was rale gled to see ye. Guid-bye, dearie. Guid-bye, an' dinna get rin ower.'

Jimsie allowed his elderly hostess to kiss him, and then with a hasty farewell, bolted down the stair.

'The daurlin'!' sighed Mrs McLeerie to herself, as she shut the door and prepared to resume operations on the birds and their case. 'I 'm gled he didna really hurt ma birds. He 's but a wean, an' he didna

ken ony better; but I wud ha'e been sair vexed if he had—Oh!'

She fairly staggered, for the rustic perch which had sustained the small blue bird was vacant. 'Ma bird's awa'!' she cried, peering stupidly about the room, as though the thing had flown of its own accord. 'He's tooken ma bird! He's tooken ma bird!'

She fled from the parlour, from the house, down the two flights of stairs, through the entry and into the street, where she stood for nearly five minutes, a helpless, pathetic figure. No sign could she see of the thief. Breathless, and too wretched to be enraged, she ascended to her house again, and there realised that she must have Mrs Munro's advice and assistance. Presently she set out for her friend's house.

. . . . . .

'If I was you, Mrs McLeerie,' said Mrs Munro, boiling with sympathetic wrath, 'I wud gang to the polis.'

'But wud the polis get back ma bird?'

'The detectives wud discover the bird for ye.'

Mrs McLeerie shook her head dolefully. 'Geordie'll ha'e pickit oot its e'en by this

time, an' he'll be squeezin' it and stickin' preens in it.'

'I thocht ye said his name was Davie.'

'Aweel, it's a' yin. Whitever his name is, he's awa' wi' ma bird. An' I'll never see it again, Mrs Munro; I'll never see it again!'

'Oh, dinna be sae lubugrious, Mistress McLeerie.'

'Ye wud be that yersel' if——'

'Ay, ay. But folks should try to bear up in affliction. . . . I'll jist tak' a walk ower bye wi' ye an' see whit's to be done.'

'I'm shair I'm vexed to trouble ye, Mistress Munro,' said Mrs McLeerie, as they proceeded to her house. 'But I wis near dementit when I seen ma bird was awa'.'

'It wud be a shock to ye, nae doot.'

'Ay, it was a' that—a shock to ma nervous cistern, as the doctor said to Mistress Scott when she fell doon the stair cairryin' the baikie.'

'Ye mean system, Mistress McLeerie.'

'Aweel, it's a' yin. . . . Ma bird's awa', an' I'll never see it again.'

Little more was said until they reached the parlour, and then at the sight of

the deserted perch Mrs McLeerie broke down.

But Mrs Munro burst out laughing. 'Whit's thon on the gasalier?' she cried.

'Ma bird, ma bird, *ma bird!*'

NAMESAKES.

(From *The Misadventures of Joseph.*)

MR JOSEPH REDHORN, the Fairport painter, was never in the best of humours when roused from a Saturday afternoon nap; and on this occasion his irritation was not lessened by the discovery of Mr John McNab, the reputed oldest inhabitant, on the doorstep of his bachelor abode.

'I'm no' gaun to bide a meenute, Joseph. I merely drapped in to bid ye come an' ha'e yer supper wi' us the nicht,' was Mr McNab's unexpected speech.

'Weel, I'm sure it's excessively kind o' ye,' the painter said, on recovering from the surprise. 'If ye'll wait for three meenutes, I'll gi'e masel' a bit tosh up.'

Mr McNab gave a hoarse but happy

chuckle. 'Ma gran'son Peter an' his wife arrived the day. Likewise their offspring.'

'D'ye tell me that?' said Mr Redhorn from behind a towel. 'Is the offspring numerous?'

'Na, na. It's their first.'

'A singular offspring!' commented the painter, polishing his bald forehead. Then suddenly he dropped the towel. 'Criftens!' He strode across the room and grasped the other's hand. 'So ye're a great-gran'-fayther!'

A little later the two were on the road, Mr Redhorn taking the old man's arm and conducting him, puffing cheerfully, homeward.

The necessary introductions were made in the little garden in front of the cottage.

'This is ma gran'son, Peter,' said Mr McNab to Joseph. 'Ye'll mind his fayther?'

Mr Redhorn nodded and shook hands with the smiling young man.

'An' this is Peter's wife, Jessie.'

Mr Redhorn blushed, touched his ancient bowler hat, and gently clasped the fingers of the pale, pretty girl who sat on the green bench with a shawl-covered bundle in her arms.

'An' this,' the old man said, with a soft chuckle, 'is ma great-gran'son.'

'A bonny wee lad, is he no'?' murmured the great-grandmother, approaching softly.

'Ay, ay,' said Joseph helplessly. Then, feeling it incumbent upon him to make some intelligent remark, he added, 'It 'll be forty year since I was as close to an infant.'

Mr McNab created a welcome diversion. 'An' noo for the gran' surprise!' he said. 'Joseph, what dae ye think we 're for namin' ma great-gran'son?' He dug the painter in the ribs. 'Ma great-gran'son's name is to be Joseph—efter yer noble sel'!'

Mr Redhorn gasped. 'Me!' he cried in dire confusion, as red as a turkey-cock. But when the young couple modestly begged his permission, his confusion became merged in gratification, and he modestly expressed the hope that he might live to be worthy of his namesake.

Four days later he called again at the cottage. 'I believe it 's a custom—an' an excellent custom it is,' he stammered, 'for a party in ma prood poseetion to—to——' Here he broke down so far as speech was concerned, and presented the young mother, on her offspring's behalf, with a silver

mug bearing the inscription: 'Joseph John McNab, 14th July, 1922, A.D.—From his well-wisher, J. R.'

. . . . . .

About three weeks after the christening Mr Redhorn fell into a depressed state. Such a condition was not infrequently his, and, as a rule, he attributed it to the fact of Providence having seen fit to supply him with 'interior organs o' inferior quality.'

While engaged in applying green paint to a summer-house in the grounds of the laird, he received the greeting of Jamie Caldwell, a gardener on the estate, and a person with whom he had hitherto enjoyed little more than a nodding acquaintance.

'In ma opeenion,' the gardener remarked, 'the pentin' 's what ye might ca' a noble trade. An' that reminds me, I was gaun to tell ye that the greenhooses up thonder are due a coat o' pent, and I was thinkin' I wud gi'e a hint to Sir Archibald to let *you* ha'e the job—that is, if ye 're wantin' it.'

'Man,' cried Joseph, 'that 's exceedin' kind o' ye. I'll be glad to ha'e the job, for the prospec's o' trade in Fairport are no' brilliant at the moment. Thenk ye, thenk ye!'

'Dinna mention it.' Mr Caldwell looked

at his watch. 'Five o'clock! Ye'll be stoppin' sune, eh? Ye best come up an' tak' yer tea wi' us the nicht. Ye ken the cottage. I'll expec' ye at the back o' six,' said Mr Caldwell.

He left the painter glowing with more than the warmth of the sun.

Mr Redhorn enjoyed his tea that night. He found Mr Caldwell a genial host, and made the acquaintance of his five children, who behaved with wondrous decorum, and treated the guest with the utmost respect. He made the acquaintance, also, of a 'fine boy' just three days old.

. . . . . .

On an evening, some months later, Mr Redhorn and Willie, his apprentice, were seated at the former's untidy but cosy hearth. On a chair between them rested a draught-board.

To all appearances Mr Redhorn was under a spell involving absence of mind. He lay back in his easy-chair, gazing vacantly, yet fixedly, at the cigarette of the worst possible quality which he held between his finger and thumb, and which had gone out some minutes ago.

'Ye're playing shockin' bad the nicht,' said Willie.

'Ay, I daur say.'

'Are ye thinkin' aboot the silver mugs, Maister Ridhorn?'

'Ay. . . . Wullie, I'm gaun to ask ye a question. Which am I lackin' in—moral courage, or——'

'Baith! Are ye no' for anither game?'

Mr Redhorn grunted. 'But hoo, I ask ye, could I refuse to let Jamie Caldwell an' Tammas Broon an' Sam McLeod name their sons "Joseph" efter masel'? I repeat, hoo could I refuse?'

'Ye didna need to refuse, but ye didna need to gi'e a' the babies mugs.'

'But I had gi'ed McNab's great-gran'son a mug.'

'Ach, weel, ye shouldna ha'e been sae saft. Ye should ha'e stopped at Caldwell, onywey.'

Mr Redhorn sighed. 'It's no' that I grudge the puir wee innocents their mugs, but. . . . Aweel, I suppose I should be thenkfu' that the baby born in Fairport the ither day — Finlay Thomson's — was o' the female gender.' He paused for a moment. 'I consulted the doctor confeedentially yesterday, an' it was encouragin' to hear that he had nae prognostications o' further juvenile arrivals afore the spring. Maybe by that

time the name "Joseph" 'll be oot o' fashion.'

'I've moved,' said Willie.

'Aweel, we'll get back to oor game, laddie. I confess I'm feelin' mair hopeful since I consulted—— Criftens! There's somebody at the door. See wha it is. It's ower late for auld John McNab.'

There entered Mr and Mrs Finlay Thomson. The latter, frail-looking, flushed, bore a bundle of shawls which emitted faint squeaks.

Said Mr Thomson after his wife was seated, 'It was a fine nicht, so we thocht we wud bring ye a dizzen new laids, likewise oor wee lassie to let ye see her.' He laughed. 'Ye see, Ridhorn, ye've got the reputation o' bein' a judge o' babies.'

Mr Redhorn laughed also. He felt safe enough this time, and did not hesitate to draw near when Mrs Thomson uncovered the little one's face. 'Vera satisfactory, vera satisfactory,' he murmured, using the phrase that was in danger of becoming a habit.

'If it had been a boy,' said the father, 'we wud ha'e asked yer leave to name it Joseph.'

'I'm sure,' said Joseph cordially, 'I wud ha'e been exceedin'ly gratified.'

'Thenk ye,' said Mr Thomson. 'In that case, an' seein' it's a lassie, we'll name it——'

He paused, smiling to his wife, who softly uttered the word—'Josephine.'

THE SINGULAR PICTURE.

(From *Joseph Redhorn*).

'DID ye never try pentin' pictur's, Maister Ridhorn?'

The apprentice put the inquiry on the way home from a day's work in a house wherein were many oil-paintings.

'That question,' Mr Redhorn gravely answered, 'tiches a tender spot, an' the reply is in the affirmative.'

'When did ye try pentin' pictur's?'

'In ma youth—in ma young an' balmy days. But I didna pent pictur's, Wullie—pictur's in the plural. I merely done a singular pictur'. Ma uncle was for burnin' it, but ma mither got the haud o't, an' I discovered it in a press efter she was awa'.

I've nae doot yer ain mither wud dae the same, Wullie. If we was a' as guid an' clever as oor mithers fancied us, it wud be an extraor'nar' fine warld! Hooever, it was ma first an' last attempt.'

'What was the pictur' aboot?'

'The subjec' o' the pictur' was unreproachable. It was a lan'scape.' Mr Redhorn sighed. 'Ye see, laddie, the ambeetion to pent a pictur' cam' on me suddenlike. An artist chap cam' to oor place an' stairted his job. It was a Seturday efternune, an' I watched him. He pentit a haystack, wi' a tree on the tae side an' a byre on the tither, an' twa-three hens in front, an' a rid sky on the tap. He said he was gaun to name it "Eve," but I thocht to masel' he micht as weel ha'e named it "Adam." That was ma eegnorance, Wullie. I thocht I could pent as guid a pictur' ony day. An' I squandered ma savin's on pents, brushes, etceetera, an' a canvas thirty-sax inches by twinty-fower.'

'That wud be a fine big pictur', Maister Ridhorn.'

'Nae bigger than ma consate. . . . Weel, then, on the next Seturday I commenced operations. I decided on a lan'scape. It seemed easy. So I tramped ower the hillside lookin'

for yin that seemed worth while. I had jist got sicht o' the vera thing, when I pit ma fit in a wasps' bike, an' had to rin for 't. I got a sting on ma broo that raised a lump like a doo's egg.—Oh, ye needna laugh!'

'I 'm sorry, but I couldna help it.'

'Maybe ye couldna. Ye wasna stung. . . . Weel, at last I got into poseetion an' set up ma easel. Then I pit my canvas on the easel. Then I got ready ma pents. Then I sat doon an' conseedered what to begin wi'. Ever since then I 've been wonderin' hoo artists ken what to begin wi'. To me it was a conundrum. But at last I decided to begin wi' the objec' o' interest nearest me. It was a fence. So I begood wi' that at the bottom o' the canvas, allooin' it twa inches. It took longer nor I had expected, but I feenished it. Then, ayont the fence, there was a field wi' coos. I done the field rough-like. It was a rough field onywey. Bein' a guid-sized field, I allooed it ten inches. That was a fit o' ma canvas used up, an' ma green pent the same, which preventit me attendin' to the trees that was there. Seein' I couldna pit in the coos till the field was dry, I gaed for the fence

at the far end o' the field. It lookit wee, so I allooed it jist an inch. An' then it lookit queer.' Mr Redhorn paused, wagging his head.

'Was that a' the pictur'?'

'Na, na. Every Seturday, for twa month, I gaed to the same spot—unfortunately it was gey boggy—an' did ma best to record what I beheld. I got in some of the coos —their legs were that confusin' when they werena staunin' square—an' I wud ha'e got in a wheen craws, if they had sat still. Then there was a hoose faur furrit on the left haun', an' I got it in, wi' a wee man at the door. The wee man wasna really there. He was an oreeginal idea o' ma ain. Then there was twa-three fields ayont the hoose, wi' fences that got wee-er an' wee-er. But I got them in!'

'Hurray!'

'Ah, laddie, I said that at the time! Ayont the fields was a plantation an' hills. I wasna feart for that, for I had providet plenty o' green pent. But when I had gotten in the plantation, I made a sad discovery. Ay, it was a blow!' Mr Redhorn halted abruptly. 'But here's yer hame, laddie. Guid-nicht to ye! Ma respects to yer mither.'

'But what was the blow, Maister Ridhorn?'

'Yer mither'll be waitin' for ye.'

'Come on! Tell us!'

'Weel,' said Mr Redhorn unwillingly, 'I discovered an error. I had stairtit wi' ower sma' a canvas. When I had gotten in the plantation, there was nae room for the hills an' the sky.'

JEMIMA AND THE CHOCOLATES.

(From *Just Jemima.*)

[Jemima goes to service at the age of seventeen. Her first place is in a superior boarding-house quietly situated on the coast. She is deeply interested in the affairs of her mistress and the boarders. She is a warm-hearted little creature, with ideals.]

AS I turned into the Sunnyburn Road, that Sunday efternune, I took a keek through the hedge o' oor gairden. An' there was Colonel Beadle sittin' flirtin' wi' Miss Tinto—an' him wi' a wife o' his ain. I could ha'e heaved a turmit at the auld blighter, but nae turmit bein' handy, I pit oot ma tongue at him and passed on. Takin' anither keek, I spied Mr Parkins snoozin', as usual, in the summer-hoose.

'Miserable wretch!' I says to him ablow ma breith, 'can ye no' think shame o' yersel' to live on yer wife the way ye're daein'—loafin' aboot day efter day, lettin' her rin the boardin'-hoose an' work like a slave! Oh, that a bumbee wud stab that useless neb o' yours, an' cause ye to loup into yonder holly-bush!'

I waited to see if ma prayer wud be granted, but evidently nane o' the numerous bumbees was seeck o' life, an' at last I walked on, wonderin' if ma ain faythers an' mither was the only folk in the warld to be happy though marrit. I never was as near takin' a vow to be singular for ever.

An' yet, here was me on the road to meet—or, rather to be met by—a young man! Oh, I'm no' gaun to pretend I was in love wi' Peter McTaggart, the railway porter, which I had seen but twice afore, an' I'm no' gaun to deny that what he said in his letter aboot choclates—'choclates to refresh you all the time': these was his words—had naething to dae wi' ma bein' on the Sunnyburn Road that Sunday, in ma pink frock, new laundered an' sweet-smellin'. I was scarcely eighteen then! Ah, me! I'll sune be nineteen!

To tell ye the truth, I didna recognise

him when he cam' roun' the corner. He was sich a swell in a broon suit an' tartan tie, an' he had on a new golfin' cap o' peasoup shade, wi' a skep on it that wud ha'e kep' his troosers dry on a wat day.

I canna say that ma colour didna deepen slightly, but a tomato wud ha'e been a ghost alongside o' him.

'I had near given up hope,' says he. 'Been up an' doon this road a score o' times. An' hoo are ye keepin'?'

'Fairly weel, thenk ye,' says I; 'an' I'll be obleeged if ye'll let go ma haun', no' to mention ma best glove.'

He didna look happy at that, an' he stood dumb till I says, 'It's a fine evenin', an' this is a bonnie spot, but I've nae notion of becomin' rooted to it.'

'Will ye come for a walk?' he says.

'For hauf-an-'oor.'

'Is that a'?'

'Ay, I've anither engagement.'

'A man?' he cries.

I waited till he apologised for askin' the question, an' then we walked on.

'Hoo's the railway?' I says, thinkin' to cheer him.

'Dinna mention the railway. It's nae job for a chap wi' brains. Hoo are ye gettin'

on at Seaview? Are ye no' terrible hard wrocht?'

'I canna complain, when Mistress Parkins works hard hersel'!'

'An' what aboot the boarders?'

'Daft, but no' dangerous.'

He shook his heid. 'I doot ye'll no' be stoppin' in this dull place anither month.'

'I couldna say.'

He was dumb till we cam' to a seat by the roadside.

'Ye'll be needin' a rest,' he says.

'They're braw shoes ye've got on,' says I.

'Oh, criffins!' says he, 'I'll no' deny they hurt me."

'Then we'll sit doon,' says I. 'I couldna bear to see a monkey sufferin'.'

'Ye've a hert efter a',' says he, an' gaed to the seat wi' great eagerosity.

He sat that close, I had to tell him to leave me room to grow. He shifted hissel' aboot hauf-an-inch an' groaned.

It wasna vera thrillin', an' there was nae word o' the choclates. When he had groaned for aboot the tenth time I speired if it was the shoes.

'It's no' the shoes, Jemima,' he says, 'though Guid kens they're bad enough. Oh dear!'

I couldna help wonderin' if he had devoured the choclates hissel', an' was noo troubled by mair nor his conscience.

Aboot twinty meenutes rolled awa'.

Suddenly he says—'Jemima!'

'What's ado?' says I.

'Say ye believe it's no' ma shoes.' An' he took a grip o' ma haun'.

I tore it awa', sayin', 'Tich not, taste not, handle not'—an' got up.

He cam' efter me, cryin', 'Dinna gang! I want to speak to ye.' But I kep' movin'. 'Dinna be offendit,' says he, wi' a face like a chippit egg. 'I've seen ye but the twice, but it was—it was love at first sicht.'

'Oh, help!' says I, an' took to ma heels. Maybe he couldna pursue me in his new shoes.

It would be near ten when I got back to Seaview frae the hoose whaur I had spent the evenin'.

'What dae ye think, Jemima?' cries the cook. 'I've had an adventure this nicht!'

'An adventure!' says I, astonished, for she's past the age for adventures. 'Ha'e ye been doon at the shore, chasin' the wilks?'

'Listen!' says she. 'I was sittin' here, aboot hauf-past-eicht, thinkin' aboot ma health an' no' extra happy, when I heard a

wee noise at the window. Bein' daylicht, I wasna feared, an' gaed ower an' opened it. There was naebody there, but a paircel was lyin' on the sill. On the paper was wrote, "From a true admirer." An' inside was a braw box o' choclates! Wasna that a fine adventure?'

'Uh-ha,' says I, feelin' kin' o' dizzy.

'Aboot hauf-a-dizzen was ower hard for me,' she says, 'but maybe your teeth 'll manage them.' An' she gi'ed me them done up in a bit o' newspaper.

There is times when it 's nae use sayin' onything.

THE REWARD.

HE shut himself within a den,
From whence he seldom stole;
He hid from all his fellow-men
Lest they should soil his soul.

He pressed his spirit into prayer;
His brain was filled with lore
Of holy things and books that bear
Upon an Evermore.

'Come out, come out,' the worldlings cried;
'Tis early for the grave!'
He only barred his door and sighed,
'I have my soul to save.'

And once a brother came his way,
And whispered in his ear:—
'For Christ's sake, come!'—He answered,
'Nay;
The touch of sin I fear.'

He met a sister shamed of face—
His hand might turn her fate—
'Now go and pray to Heaven for grace,'
Quoth he; 'I dare not wait.'

In time he died; his soul was saved—
Was ever soul so white?—
And to a palace golden paved
They led him thro' the light,

And o'er a kingdom voiceless, vast,
Upon a flashing throne,
They set this soul of sinless past,
And left him there . . . alone.

THE COLONEL'S BETTER NATURE.

(From *Just Jemima.*)

ONYBODY that kens me 'll tell ye I 'm o' a discreet an' canny disposeetion, an' I 've aye a guid word for the majority o' ma fellow-creatures. I try to keep in mind ma fayther's advice — never to judge folk frae their ootsides, nae matter hoo ill-favoured their ootsides may be.

But I maun say what I think o' Colonel Beadle, or burst. Oh, yon 's no' a nice man!

The ither mornin' when me an' Mistress Parkins was makin' the beds, I says to her— 'It 's a peety the colonel doesna treat his leddy kinder, is it no', mem?'

'I hardly think it 's any business of yours, Jemima,' she says, but no' angrily.

'Maybe no', mem,' I replies. 'But I canna help takin' an interest in your ludgers—beg paurdon, payin' guests.'

'Still, you are not asked to express opinions on them. As for Colonel Beadle—well, we all have our little peculiarities.'

'Ye 're ower tender, mem,' I says. 'I

believe you would ha'e an excuse for the man that murdered his granny for a shillin'.'

The same day I spoke to Frederick, the boots, aboot the colonel.

'Oh,' says he careless-like, 'ye'll sune get used to him bitin' off her nose. It's jist his way.'

'What!' says I, 'did ye never feel like takin' him by the scruff o' the neck and shovin' his face in his soup?'

'That's no' the way to appeal to a man's better nature, Jemima.'

'I dinna believe he's got ony better nature. I would as sune look for that in a wilk!'

'Weel, ye mightna look in vain, if ye gaed deep enough,' says Frederick.

Realisin' he was chaffin' me, I left him in high gudgeon.

Later on, Mistress Parkins sent me oot to the gairden to pluck roses for the table, and there I seen Mistress Beadle sittin' her lane an' readin' a book. She had oot her hanky, but whether to wipe her eyes, or her nose, or to frichten the flies, I canna say. But, oh, I was vexed for her. What a cruel fate to be cemented for life to sich a savage, bad-tempered character. An' yet, nae doot, there had been a day when he wud ha'e stood on

his heid an' ett grass to win her cauldest smile! Oh, men, men!

It was then that I minded Frederick's words aboot better natures. 'What,' thinks I, 'if the colonel has got yin, efter a'!' It's queer hoo wan notion leads to anither. As I plucked the beauteous roses, keepin' a shairp look-oot for bumbees, etceetera, ma heid got fu' o' them—notions, I mean—an' when I gaed back to the hoose, I felt like cryin' 'Eureka,' that bein' the name o' the genius which inventit hot baths by accident in the time o' Julius Caesar, an' got a stove-polish called efter him. Sich is fame!

The first chance I got, I apologised to Frederick for ma high gudgeon. 'It's merely a temporary apology,' I says to him. 'I'll maybe ha'e to tak' it back the morn's mornin'; but in the meantime I'm admittin' ye may be richt aboot Colonel Beadle's better nature.'

'My, ye're a comic,' says he. 'What's on for the morn's mornin'?'

'Ha, ha!' says I. 'Wait an' see!'

That nicht, when I made ma rounds to turn doon the beds, I took a bonnie wee rosebud wi' me. When I laid oot the colonel's pyjameses—which must ha'e made the man look like a dementit zebra—I slipped the

rosebud into the pocket, beside his hanky. At first I had meant to pit in a wee note wi' it, sayin,' 'Wi' fondest love,' or 'In memory o' happy days o' yore'; but I didna ken Mrs Beadle's front name, and I didna want the colonel to flatter hissel' that it was frae some ither leddy in the hoose. So I left the bud to speak for itsel', an' gaed doonstairs feelin' hopefu' that it wud mind him o' the days when he coorted Mistress Beadle.

But I didna enjoy ma usual repose, an' the lark had a lang stairt next mornin'. The cook likewise slep' in, efter a bad dream aboot three pun' o' haricock beans that had turned into earwigs; an' Mistress Parkins rose on her wrang side. If it hadna been for Frederick, the boarders wud ha'e had to whustle awhile for their breakfasts. We jist managed it, an' the boarders sat doon at the usual 'oor—a' excep' the colonel; but he had often been late afore. Ye can imagine I was on the tenterhooks to see if the charm had worked.

I couldna see ony difference in Mistress Beadle; but it wasna to be expectit that her face wud grow cheery in a nicht, efter her bein' sat on for aboot hauf a century.

When the colonel cam' doon at last, I was that highly strung up I couldna look for a

long time. An' when I did look, I felt like daein' a swoon on the lino.

His face was as black as thunder, an' doon the side o' his big nose was a terrible rid scratch.

JOHNNY PRYDE AND THE GORGONZOLA.

(From *Johnny Pryde.*)

[Johnny Pryde is message boy to Mr P. Clark, grocer, in the little town of Kirkside.]

EVERY mornin', at 8.30. A.M. promp', I sally forth, as the book says, to seek for orders. It was kin' o' excitin' at first, when I was green to the job, but noo I 'm aboot fed up wi' it. I wouldna be a commercial traveller for a million pounds. If it wasna that P. Clark was dependin' on me, I would chuck the groceries and become a famous explorer.

I got discouraged ower a bit o' cheese called gorgonzola that had been in the shop since afore ma time, and seemed like to bide there for ever and ever. Oh, yon 's a fearsome cheese! But ye never can tell what the gentry 'll be eatin' next.

I hadna been long in the shop afore I seen that P. Clark was unhappy aboot that gorgonzola. When trade was slack he would sort o' drift ower to the shelf where it bided under a big glass cover, and stand and look at it melancholy-like, and noo and then let oot a groan. I was vexed for the man—there would be five or six pun' o' the stuff—and one day I says, respectful-like, says I, 'There doesna seem to be ony great run on that article, Mr Clark.'

'Nae run at a',' says he, 'as far as human bein's is concerned. That gorgonzola, ma lad, was ta'en into stock to oblige a gentleman that was passionately fond o' it. He told me he could guarantee to tak' at least a pun' a week, and the riper the better. But jist after he had got the first pun'——'

'Dinna tell me the blighter gaed back on his word!' I cries.

'Whisht, John! The puir gentleman is defunk. His end was vera sudden.'

'I dinna wonder at that!' says I. 'But could ye no' ha'e got his widow to tak' ower the lump?'

'He was a bachelor,' says P. Clark.

After another week had rolled by, and neither him nor the gorgonzola was lookin' ony cheerier, I thought I would tak' the

thing in hand masel'. I wasna gaun to surrender wi'oot a struggle to a gorgonzola cheese. So that night, lyin' in ma bed, I made up a sort o' wee speech, and the next mornin' I mentioned the gorgonzola at every back door and a few front ones. Some o' the servant-girls seemed to think it was a joke, but I told them, if they gi'ed me an order, they would soon see it was a serious affair.

I kep' on mentionin' that gorgonzola for near a fortnight, wi'oot gettin' a single kind word. And that wasna the worst. A lot o' the servant-girls began to tak' their fun off me, and some o' them calls me Johnny Gorgonzola to this day. Sometimes they would start on it afore I could say a word. They would ask hoo Mr Gorgonzola was keepin' this mornin', and hope he hadna had a bad night, jist as if the rotten thing was a frien' o' mines. They would ask its age, and hoo high it could jump, and was it fond o' music and so forth. To tell ye the truth, I began to wish I had left the gorgonzola to dee a nateral death.

But ye never ken your luck. I had gi'ed up hope, when one mornin' I hit the bull's eye; and in the last place I expected—the Free Kirk manse. The minister's lady hap-

pened to be at the door hersel', and frae the cock o' her e'e, I fancied she had rose on her right side that mornin'. So after we had got through the ordinar' business, I says, vera polite-like, says I, 'If ye please, ma'am, Mr Clark has secured'—that was true, for he had it under a thick glass cover—'a choice piece o' the finest gorgonzola cheese——'

'Gorgonzola!' she cries.

'That's its name, ma'am, and its nature's much the same,' says I.

'Gorgonzola!' she says again, and thinks for a whiley. Then she says, 'Not too ripe, is it, my boy?'

'Jist commencin' for to bud,' says I. (*N.B.*—Folk ha'e different notions o' ripeness in cheeses.)

Then she bids me bide a minute, and I guessed she was off to tell the minister, though I would never ha'e said he looked a gorgonzolian.

In a wee while she comes back and says, 'Yes, you may send a pound of the gorgonzola.'

I jist as near as near flung ma cap in the air. I couldna get back to the shop quick enough; in fac', I forgot aboot half a dozen calls. And I ran into the shop yellin' 'Hurray!'

'Guidsakes, laddie!' cries P. Clark, puttin' on his specs. 'What's up wi' ye? Is the strike settled?'

'I've got quit o' a pun' o' your auld gorgonzola!'

'Ye've what?'

'I'm sayin' I've got quit o' a pun' o' the defunk gentleman's fancy cheese. It's been terrible hard work, but ye're welcome.'

'Oh my!' says he several times. 'What on earth made ye tak' an order for a thing I canna supply?'

'Canna supply!' I says, and sat doon in a barrel o' grapes at eightpence per pound.

'I couldna endure it in ma shop another day,' he says, and groaned, 'and last nicht I took it doon to the river and drooned it.'

POOR PUSSY.

(From *Mr Pennycook's Boy.*)

WITH her knitting, old Mrs Cherry sat at the parlour window of No. 5 Glabberton Terrace, looking out occasionally on the muddy road and greasy pavement, or at the houses opposite. Despite the

depressing weather and the fact that she lived alone, Mrs Cherry had for some days been gay with a childish feeling that something was going to happen. But then she so often felt that way that she was never disappointed.

So she kept her wires busy and prattled cheerfully to her seven canaries, whose cages were ranged about her on small tables, until her attention was caught by a little scene at the foot of the steps leading to No. 4 Glabberton Terrace.

There a small boy, who wore no overcoat, was standing, engaged in making faces expressive of the utmost contempt and derision at some one, who, Mrs Cherry guessed, had not yet closed the door of No. 4. The small boy was hugging something inside his jacket, and, when at last he turned, Mrs Cherry saw that it was a black cat.

Then the boy came up the steps of No. 5, caught sight of Mrs Cherry, touched his cap to her and smiled so sweetly and so pathetically that the old lady looked again to see if there was not another boy still standing in front of No 4.

'I wonder what he wants,' said Mrs Cherry to herself.

She laid down her knitting, and, with

a word or two to her canaries, left the parlour, carefully closing the door behind her.

'Well, boy, what do you want?'

The youngster touched his cap again.

'Please, mistress, is this your cat?'

'Dear me, no! No, indeed!'

'Oh!' The boy looked disappointed.

'What made you think it was my cat?' she inquired kindly. 'I've never had a cat in my house—except once, and it got in when I wasn't watching and killed three of my birds.'

'That was a peety, mistress.'

His sympathy pleased Mrs Cherry.

'But why did you bring the cat to me, my dear?'

'I—I was tryin' to find oot wha it belonged to.' He explained that he had found it straying, and apparently starving, and had set himself the task of discovering its home.

The old lady was touched. 'Have you tried any other houses?'

'Ay. But the folk was angry at me for ringin' the bell.' He stroked the cat tenderly. 'Are ye awfu' hungry, puir pussy?'

The cat mewed querulously and endeavoured to get out of her nest.

'She's kin' o' wild for want o' meat, mistress,' he explained apologetically.

Mrs Cherry could hate no living thing, unless, perhaps, the one cat which had destroyed her canaries. She patted the lad on the shoulder. 'Come in, my dear. Pussy shall have some milk, and you—well, would you like a piece of cake or an orange?'

'Thenk ye kindly, mistress,' he said, stepping into the hall, after carefully wiping his boots on the mat.

Mrs Cherry, fancying he was too shy. to declare which of the two dainties he preferred, retired for a couple of minutes and returned with both, and also a saucer of milk, the sight of the last causing the cat to struggle free from her protector.

'My! she likes that fine!' exclaimed the boy, as the cat settled down to the feast.

The hostess bent down and stroked the black fur cautiously. 'It doesn't seem very thin,' she remarked; 'it cannot have strayed far.'

'That's whit I was thinkin' masel',' he returned, more at his ease. 'But I'm sorry it's no' your cat! Ye wud be that kind to it, mistress.'

Mrs Cherry laughed and shook her head rather doubtfully. 'What is your name, my boy?'

'John M'Turk.'

'Well, John, I 'm delighted to know you are kind to dumb animals, and I 'm pleased you came to me to-day.'

John gazed bashfully at the floor.

'And what are you going to do about poor pussy, John?'

'Aw, I—I 'll jist ha'e to try the ither hooses here. Maybe I 'll find the richt yin yet.'

Mrs Cherry said she hoped he would, and mentioned that her friend in No. 14 kept cats, and that John might mention her name there. And after some more conversation John suddenly noticed that pussy had finished her milk, whereupon he picked her up, and with a grateful farewell departed, bearing in his pocket not only the orange but a bright new sixpence.

'That boy,' said Mrs Cherry to herself, as she returned to her canaries and her knitting, 'that boy will do well in the world. He has a good heart.'

Without delay John M'Turk called at No. 6. He was received by a maid who merely shook her head and closed the door.

At No. 7 he varied his inquiry by saying, 'If ye please, ha'e ye lost a cat?'

'I wish to goodness we had!' came the reply, followed by a fierce slam.

The maid at No. 8 sighted him from the area window, and did not trouble to answer his three rings.

At No. 9, however, he received kindness if not satisfaction.

The pretty schoolgirl who opened the door sympathised and regretted she could not claim the waif. She encouraged John to talk, and finally concluded that he was such a 'queer, kind boy' that she gave him a handful of her engaged sister's chocolate creams, and also two pennies which she borrowed from the cook, while pussy was presented with a piece of fish left over from breakfast. John left with many thanks and a promise that, failing to discover the owner, he would bring the cat back to No. 9.

No. 10 was shut up. No. 11 was occupied by a lady, who, after about five minutes, explained that she had lost her hearing, but nothing else that she was aware of. A policeman was talking to the maid at No. 12, so John passed on. An elderly gentleman in a dressing gown opened the door of No. 13, and gruffly exclaimed, 'Begone, boy!'

John went at once.

No. 14 was the house referred to by the mistress of No. 5, and John's reference stood him in good stead. The lady of No. 14 liked

Mrs Cherry and adored cats, and although the cat brought by John was not one of the quartet owned by her, she treated the creature to some milk, and John to a tartlet and a threepenny-bit.

'I would willingly take poor pussy,' she said; 'but my husband will not allow me to keep more than four cats.'

'Whit a shame, mistress,' said John.

'It is a shame!' agreed the lady. 'But I do hope you will find her home soon. Good-bye, my boy, and good luck to you.'

'The same to you, mistress, an' thenk ye kindly,' said John, and resumed his quest.

He was beginning to feel tired, and his burden showed signs of fractiousness. 'Whisht, pussy,' he whispered soothingly, 'ye'll sune be hame noo.'

The rain, which had been drizzling, began to fall heavily, but he tucked the cat more closely under his jacket and climbed the steps of No. 15. There were children at the window who hailed him gleefully, under the impression that he carried a monkey. On discovering their mistake, however, their glee departed, and he was turned from the door with ignominy.

No. 17 was closed, and at No. 18, Glabberton Terrace ended.

'Yes,' said the maid at No. 18, 'we lost our cat the day before yesterday.'

John's heart gave a bump.

'But ours were a white cat.'

John returned to the pavement and hurried round the corner.

Against a row of railings a cripple boy with his crutches was leaning, chafing his chilled hands. At John's approach he looked up eagerly.

John advanced with a happy, reassuring grin on his countenance. 'See that!' he exclaimed, exhibiting his wealth and the orange.

The cripple smiled. 'That's better luck nor yesterday, Johnny,' he cried, stroking pussy affectionately.

'Ay. It's no' bad, Peter. But we'll tak' pussy hame noo. She canna eat ony mair.'

THE RING.

(From *Wee Macgreegor Enlists.*)

THE moment they were alone Macgregor said, 'Christina, will ye look at the ring noo?'

Christina, apparently intent on the fire, did not answer.

'I hope ye'll like it, Christina. It's got pearls on it. I—I hope it'll fit ye.' A pause. 'I wish ye would say something.'

'What'll I say?'

'Onything. I never heard ye dumb afore.'

'Maybe I'm reformin'.'

'*Christina!*'

'That's ma name, but ye needna tell the folk ootbye.'

'Christina, dinna tease! We've awfu' little time. Here it is—see! Please try it on.'

'I'm no' in the habit o' acceptin' rings frae young men.'

'But—but we're engaged.'

'That's news; but I doot it's no official.'

'At least we're near engaged. Say we are, Christina.'

'This is most embarrassin', Mr Robinson!'

'Aw, Christina!' For a space he looked helpless, then suddenly he seized her hand and endeavoured to put on the ring. 'It's ower wee!' he cried aghast.

'That's ma middle-finger.'

He slipped it on the third, crying triumphantly, '*Noo* we're engaged!'

Christina could not but look at it.

'Ye're an extravagant thing,' she said softly. 'I hope ye got it on appro.'

'What!—dae ye no' like it?'

'It's lovely—but ye shouldna ha'e bought it, Mac.' She made to remove it.

He caught at her hand. 'But we're engaged!'

A trifle sharply she said, 'Ye're ower sure o' that!'

He stared in dismay.

'Firstly,' she proceeded, 'I never said I wud tak' the ring. Secondly, ye ha'ena spoke to ma uncle yet.'

'I'm no' feart for your uncle—if ye back me up. Him and your aunt'll dae onything ye like.'

'Thirdly, ye ha'e never——' she stopped short.

'What ha'e I no' done, Christina?'

'Never heed. Kindly leave go ma fingers.'

'But ye'll keep the ring?

'Hoo can I keep the ring when ye ha'e never——' Once more she stopped. She freed her hand.

'Tell me, and I'll dae it, Christina!'

She shook her head, smiling a little sadly. 'I canna tell ye—and maybe ye wouldna like me better if I could.' She

took off the ring, and with a wistful glance at it, offered it to him.

He took it, and, before she knew, it was on her finger again.

'Ye've jist *got* to keep it!' he cried desperately. 'And, Christina, I—I'm gaun to kiss ye!'

'Oh, mercy!'

But he had none.

At last—'Noo; are we engaged, or no'?' he whispered.

'Let me get ma breath.'

'Hurry up!'

She laughed, though her blue eyes were wet. 'Oh dear,' she murmured, 'I never thought I would get engaged withoot a—a——'

'A what, Christina?' He was all tender anxiety.

Suddenly she leaned forward and, with a sigh, touched his cheek.

'Dinna fash yoursel', Mac, dear. I suppose in these times the best o' us has got to dae withoot some luxury or ither—sich as a proper, romantic proposal.'

HOW CHRISTINA CAME BACK.

(From *Wee Macgreegor Enlists.*)

THEY were no longer engaged to be married. Christina, all haughtiness and pride, had handed him back the ring; Macgregor, hot with anger and misery, had dropped it on the floor, ground it under his heel, and marched out. And next day, with Willie Thomson, he had gone back to the fighting in Flanders.

And, a fortnight later, Christina received this letter from Willie Thomson:

Dear Christina,—If you are wanting a perfect man, buy yourself a statue from the Museum. Then you can treat him cold, and he will not notice other girls when you leave him for to enjoy yourself. Mac was not for having any when he first seen Fat Maggie, but he was vexed at you for going away to Aberdeen with his aunt, and I egged him on for fun, and he took Maggie to the pictures, and in a cab because it was pouring, and maybe he gave her a bit squeeze, I do not know for certain, but if he did, it was likely she began it, for Maggie would rather have a cuddle than a good dinner any

day. Likewise there is times when a chap must squeeze something. It is no use for a girl to expect her intended to keep minding her when she is not there, unless she makes it worth his while with nice letters and so forth. He soon gets fed up on cold nothings. Mac does not care a rotten apple for Maggie, but you went away and left him nothing better to do, and she is a nice girl and soft with a man, so God forgive you as I will not do till I hear you are ready to kiss Mac again. Mac is wounded in two places, but not mortal. He got wounded saving my life. Probably you will see him soon, so prepare to behave yourself. Hoping you will take this advice more kindly nor usual. —Yours truly, W. THOMSON.

P.S.—If you was less proud and more cuddlesome you would not lose much in this world.

Macgregor was in a small hospital not far from London. He was more unhappy than pained now. Truly he had made a horrid mess of it — and yet he rebelled against taking all the blame. Christina could not have cared much when she would listen to no explanations. Suddenly he had a great longing for the touch of his mother, the smile of his father, the soft speech of his sister, the eager pipings of his little brother. If only Christina had sent him one word. . . .

A nurse appeared, smoothed his pillow, and drew down the blinds against the afternoon sun. And presently Macgregor slipped into a doze.

He awoke to what seemed a dream. Seated at his bedside was Aunt Purdie, of all people! In a hesitating way, quite unlike her, she laid her hand on his and patted it gently.

'What's up?' he exclaimed.

'How do you do, Macgregor?' she said formally yet timidly.

'I'm fine, thenk ye,' he answered, from sheer force of habit. Then his wits grew clearer. 'Ye've come a lang road to see me, Aunt Purdie.'

'It *is* a conseederable distance.' She cleared her throat. 'We are all exceedingly proud of you, Macgregor.'

'Me? What for?'

'Oh, *I* know all about it—how you saved your friend William's life!'

Macgregor's hand went to his head. 'I suppose I'm awake. Wha's been stuffin' ye, Aunt Purdie?'

Aunt Purdie's manner became almost sprightly. 'Christina, her own self, informed me! So there you are, young man!'

Macgregor's head wagged wearily on the

pillow. 'What a mix up! It was Wullie saved me!' Then, with an effort, 'When did ye see—her?'

Again Aunt Purdie patted his hand. 'Now you must keep calm. As a matter of fac', I seen—saw—her about five minutes ago. She is without.'

'Without what?'

'She is in an adjacent apartment. I am going to send her to you. But mind!—no excitement!'

Macgregor's eyes closed. When he opened them again Christina was there.

'Are ye feelin' better, Mac?'

'Oh, ay. It was kind o' ye to come. I suppose Aunt Purdie wanted comp'ny.'

'Jist that.'

'A' the same, it was kind o' ye, and noo —noo I can tell ye the truth.'

'No' a word, Mac, for I 'll no' listen.'

His gaze fell. He heaved a sigh of resignation. 'But it was Wullie saved me,' he said.

Christina may not have heard. She was surveying the ward. Macgregor's near neighbours were asleep, and the only patient sitting up was intent on a jig-saw puzzle. But had all been awake and watching, the girl would still have found a way. With

the least possible movement she knelt down by the bedside.

'Christina!' he breathed, for her face, with its wet blue eyes, was near to his.

Her fingers went to the neck of her white blouse and drew up a narrow black ribbon. From it hung, shining, the tiny wreckage of her engagement ring. 'Mac, dear,' she whispered, 'can—can we no' ha'e it mended?'

PETER AT THE PICTURES.

THE other afternoon I was sitting in a picture-house, when a mother and her little boy came in and took seats just in front of me. The mother's sigh of relaxation as she seated herself suggested that she was an overworked, overworried woman who wanted simply to get away, for an hour or so, from it all. Her little boy's remarks made it evident that this was his first visit to such a place of entertainment, also that he would not have been there could his mother have left him at home. He sat very quietly through the comedy, but woke up for the drama.

It was one of those dramas in which everybody is well-dressed and nobody has anything to do except make mischief or get into it. The hero, though he had just been swindled out of all his money, continued to rush about in a magnificent car and to take the heroine to dine in the most fashionable restaurants. The heroine, left destitute in the first reel, went on appearing in a new 'creation' every five minutes.

In a perfectly gorgeous drawing-room the hero and heroine met. Their lips met also.

'Maw,' said the little boy aloud, 'is that her faythe r she 's kissin' ?'

'Sh !'

'But is he her faythe r ?'

In a hushed voice the mother replied, 'Whisht, Peter ! He 's her intendit.'

'Whit ?'

'Her intendit.'

'Did *he* no' intend it ?'

'Whisht, whisht !'

'But, Maw. . . . Oh ! they 're awa' ! Maw, whaur are they awa' to ? . . . Oh, see thon wife wi' the hairy whuskers roun' her hat ! Whit 's she sayin' to the auld man ?'

'He 's the duke an' she 's the doochess.'

'Whit ? . . . Oh, there the ither yins

back! Whit for did they come back? They're kissin' again! Did he intend it that time?'

'Peter, if ye canna keep quate, I'll ha'e to tak' ye oot.'

For a little while there was silence, then 'Maw! . . . *Maw!* . . . MAW!'

'Whit is't ye want, Peter?'

'Whit's thon man's name?—Aw, he's awa'! . . . Whit's thon leddy got in the wee botle? Is she gaun to tak' meddicine? . . . Oh! she's awa'! Is she awa' to tak' the meddicine? Is she, Maw?'

'Whisht, whisht!'

'But is she? Whit kin' o' meddicine was it? Maw, whit kin' o'——'

'It was pooshon. She's the bad yin, an' she wants to pooshon the guid yin.'

'Whit wey does she want—— Oh! there her an' her fayther back again! Maw, she's greetin'! Whit wey——'

'She's greetin' because her an' him are gaun to pairt.'

'Gaun to a pairty? Oh! . . . Does she no' want to gang? Wull he no' let her?—Oh! they're awa' to the pairty!'

Presently appeared on the screen what is technically termed a 'close up' of the heroine—just her full face wearing a most

pathetic look and a beautiful tear under each eye.

Peter's mother gave an audible sniff, but Peter blithely exclaimed, 'Oh, whit a big face!'

This time she shook him—and no wonder.

Peter apparently accepted the reprimand in good part, and soon afterwards yawned and laid his head against his mother's arm. She sighed—possibly with relief—and settled down to enjoy what was left of the picture. Ten minutes passed in peace. Then, without the slightest hint of what was coming, Peter let out a loud hiccup. As the hiccup synchronised with the ducal dinner-party, its effect on the audience was considerable. Some laughed aloud; others, one may imagine, were annoyed. And before long an attendant came and whispered what must have been a caution to the mother. But Peter still slept.

He woke up just before the end.

After much tribulation the hero and heroine had come together again; the bad folk had received punishment; and all was well.

In the sunset glow the lovers stood by the lake. They embraced, and Peter remarked, 'She likes her faythe r!'

'Whisht, whisht!' whispered his mother, but absently, for I think she was now drinking in the last drops of sentiment and romance before returning to her drab world.

Still embracing, the lovers were seen in a shining circle. Slowly the circle closed in upon them. . . .

'Oh! they've got nae legs! Oh! they've got nae bodies! . . . Naething but heids! Maw, whit wey—— Oh! They're awa'!'

Mother wiped her eyes.

Peter let out another loud hiccup—and the lights went up.

HEATHER.

SHE had never trod the moorland where
the happy heather glows,
Never rested on the rarest couch that weary
mortal knows,
Never let her life slow down and down
until it scarcely beat—
She had never touched the heather till she
hawked it on the street.

'Twas the flower of Scotland's summer that
she held within her hand,
'Twas the bloom men break their hearts for
—but she did not understand;

Oh, her eyes found nothing lovable, her nostrils nothing sweet—
She had never known the heather till she hawked it on the street.

But she called the name right glibly, tho' the name was void of sense,
Save as when she'd dealt in roses and the roses stood for pence,
And the pence a hole to lie in and a crust of bread to eat—
She had never named the heather till she hawked it on the street.

Now the saints are full of fervour, and the saints go far abroad,
And the saints would die to see the world brought safely home to God. . . .
And in town there sobbed a hungry child, in rags, with shoeless feet,
Who had never seen God's heather till she hawked it on the street.

HIGH LIFE IN THE FUTURE.

'MY dear,' said the duke, pausing in the task of black-leading his Sunday boots, 'don't you think that we might find time for a little walk this afternoon;

just a simple, inexpensive stroll in the grounds?'

'Quite imposs., Wilfrid,' returned the duchess. 'As soon as I have got this blanc-mange out of the tin and peeled the potatoes, I must tidy up the scullery and dust what is left of the drawing-room, and then I must change my jumper in case the general should call. Besides, you know you have got to clean the henhouse.'

'I hate cleaning the henhouse,' the duke said crossly. 'I can't see the use of cleaning the henhouse. The hens seem to prefer it dirty, and, anyway, they don't lay a bit faster. Not a darned egg to-day! It's simply rotten!'

'Swearing won't help,' remarked her grace. 'Oh, bother this blanc-mange! It simply *won't* come out!'

'Can't you prise it out with something?'

'I can't bear to spoil its shape. It's all we've got for dinsup to-night, except the potatoes and that soup tablet. Now where did I put the blessed thing?'

'In the soap-dish,' said the duke, pointing. 'You put it there to remind you of something you had forgotten.'

'So I did. . . . Oh, this fiendish blanc-mange! Will it never come out?'

'I can't imagine,' said the duke, peering closely, 'why I don't get a better shine on these boots.' And he threw the brush into the stock-pot, and sighed heavily. 'Ermyntrude, have you any hope that the good old days may yet return; that, for example, we shall once more, in comfort and decency, *dine?*'

'The answer is in the neg.,' replied the duchess, who, with the best intentions, had once stood for Parliament, only to drop £150, thereby finishing the fortunes of a noble house. 'How,' she went on, 'can any sane person hope to dine, in the old sense of the word, when one's income is next to nothing a year, and when even a grandmother's help won't work more than twenty-one hours a week?'

'And whisky three guineas per bot.! Too true!' wailed his grace. 'We can never dine again! . . . Ermyntrude, no longer do I fear dissolution!'

'Come, come, cheer up, Wilfrid! Things might be worse. Remember that our children are all earning money, and, some day, may be able to spare a little; also our old age pensions are not so very far away.'

'Well, well,' said the duke, 'if you can stick it, I suppose I must make one more

effort. By the way, isn't there something left in the cellar? I would fain drink a glass to-night with your delightful blanc-mange.'

'I'm afraid we'll have to eat the brute out of the tin—can't think what has gone wrong,' said the duchess. 'No, Wilfrid; I'm sorry to disappoint you, but there's nothing in the cellar except a small bottle of ipecacuanha wine, and I fear it has gone queer.'

'But—but what about the bottle of the famous "Three Bobs" brandy laid down by my father in the year——?'

'The bottle is there all right, but your father, my poor Wilfrid, must have laid it down carelessly, for it is cracked and empty.'

With a majestic gesture of despair, the duke threw up his hands, and knocked five pot-lids from their pegs.

Within the instant the blanc-mange came out with a 'flupp,' and a bell rang loudly.

'Mercy! It's the front door,' cried her grace, 'and me not dressed!'

'I'll go,' said the duke gallantly.

'You can't. The point of your nose is absolutely black!' said the duchess, and hurriedly deposited the blanc-mange on a convenient chair.

'Must have rubbed it on a boot. A curse on my ancestors who bequeathed to me little more than a long nose and short sight!'

'You'll find turpentine in the larder,' said his wife, and flew upstairs.

'To-night,' soliloquised the duke, 'when I go to bed I shall turn off the gas—and turn it on again.' And with a weary groan he sank slowly upon the nearest chair, and fell asleep.

A few minutes later the duchess burst into the scullery, waving a registered letter.

'Wilfrid!'

'Oh, don't wake me,' he murmured; 'I'm *so* comf.!'

'But, Wilfrid, it's the most splendid news.'

'I dreamed,' came the drowsy response, 'I was resting on a couch that had no broken springs——'

'Listen! Geoffrey has got a rise, and has sent five pounds!'

'Five pounds!' His grace rose and embraced her ditto. 'May Heaven reward the boy! Ermyntrude, to-night after din-sup we must do a picture-house.'

'Oh, my poor blanc-mange!' shrieked the duchess. 'Absolutely flat!'

But even as they gazed in dismay, the blanc-mange resumed its pristine shape.

'Squeezed, not squashed!' muttered the duke, quoting the ancestral motto.

A THING OF BEAUTY.

ALICE'S favourite uncle dropped in the other afternoon. He was once professor of a weighty and abstruse subject, and is now in a fair way to become a philosopher on trifles. He and I were seated at the fireside, smoking and discussing the possibilities of Spitzbergen as a golfing resort, when Alice came in, all smiles, with an egg. 'The fourth to-day!' she announced. 'Isn't it lovely?'

I saw the philosophic light dawn in the still professorial eye, and prepared for the worst.

He rose, laid aside his pipe, and, as though it were the Koh-i-noor, took the egg in his palm. 'For once, my dear Alice,' he said kindly, 'I have heard you use the right word in the right place. This egg is indeed lovely!'

He set his left foot on the fender's edge,

rested his left arm on the mantel-shelf, and poised the egg just within the tips of his long fingers. Gently he cleared his throat, and Alice and I seated ourselves and looked becomingly attentive. 'It is at once an extraordinary and deplorable fact,' he began, 'that the beauty of the egg of the domestic fowl is rarely, if ever, recognised. I rejoice, Alice, to think that you have discerned that which is unseen, or ignored, by humanity in general. You have called this egg lovely—beautiful——'

'Well, uncle,' said my too honest Alice modestly, 'I don't suppose I really meant that it was exactly beaut——'

He frowned. 'Ah! Have I congratulated you—and myself—prematurely? . . . Then what, may I ask, did you mean precisely by the word "lovely"?'

'Oh, just jolly and—and all that.'

'Jolly! Come, come! Be good enough to examine the egg closely and calmly, and inform us on what grounds you now describe it as jolly. Is it noisily gay? Is it ribaldly humorous? Is it inebriated?'

'Inebriated, I should say,' I put in, thinking to rescue Alice. 'For one thing, professor, it is full and cannot stand. Again——'

'When I desire levity, I shall request you to favour me,' he said, still glaring at my poor wife.

'What I really meant,' she faltered, 'was —er—ripping.'

'Ripping? This is quite hopeless!' he wailed. Then, obviously striving for self-control, 'Let us go back to the beginning. Inadvertently you have correctly described this egg as lovely, and I can only hope that you may yet come to mean what you have said. Truly, it is a thing of beauty and a joy for ever!'

'Question!' I muttered.

'Do be quiet,' whispered Alice.

But the professor was now fully wound up. 'Yet who,' he cried, 'has the eye to see it as such? In the course of its too brief career, this particular egg, I am aware, will not pass through many hands. For the moment, however, we may consider it as one which has been laid on a farm. First of all, then, the farmer's wife snatches it from the nest, thinking only of its market value; next, the dealer drives his bargain over it; the retailer reckons his likely profit; later, the housewife purchases it, grudging the price and probably complaining of the size; then, without the

slightest emotion, the cook boils it; and finally, the consumer, with greedy glance, shatters and devours it! Not one of them, I venture to assert, gazes upon it in artistic rapture, exclaiming, "What a beautiful thing to have come into the world!"'

'Top-hole, uncle!' cried Alice, quite carried away; while I added a discreet 'Hear, hear!'

The professor was now thoroughly warmed to his lecture. Raising the egg to the level of his eyes, he declaimed, 'Note the perfect contour, the delicate brown tint, the exquisite virginal bloom still lingering upon the surface—a bloom not to be surpassed by the bloom of a girlish cheek——'

'Tut, tut, professor,' I muttered before I knew.

'Why do you say "tut, tut"?' he demanded. 'How dare you, sir? Is there any good reason why I should not refer to the gloom of a chirlish beek——?'

Unfortunately Alice giggled. Then she shrieked, 'Oh, be careful!'

In vain. The professor's foot slipped from the fender, the egg toppled from his finger-tips, fell, and exploded on the hearth.'

'Bang went 3d.!' said Alice. Then she

flew and embraced the discomfited old gentleman.

'Never mind, professor,' I said as kindly as I could; 'if you have not exactly pointed a moral, you have certainly adorned a good many tiles.'

METHOD.

I PREVENTED her just in time.

'Miranda,' I said, 'have I not repeatedly told you that one ought *never* to burn a receipt before it is seven years old?'

'You have — repeatedly,' she returned pleasantly; 'but when one pays the bills weekly, it isn't easy to keep a museum in a flat of four apartments.'

'You shall have a larger house as soon as I can afford it.'

'Don't want a larger house, Henry. But I hate to see silly bits of paper kicking about everywhere.'

'It needs only a little method, Miranda. Folded, docketed and tied in bundles monthly, they need not take up much room. And a receipt is, or may prove to be, a thing of serious importance.'

'What did you have for lunch to-day?'

'Had no time for more than a bun and a glass of milk.'

'I thought so, poor dear! Nothing like milk for method!' She smiled and blew me a kiss.

I disregarded the levity. 'What would you do,' I said quietly, 'if you got an account for, say, fifteen pounds, nine shillings and fourpence, which you had already paid, but for which you could show no receipt. What would you do, Miranda?'

'Nothing.'

'And if it were rendered again, with a request for payment—what would you do?'

'More nothing.'

'Then you might eventually be summoned to appear at the County Court——'

'What fun! Of course, I should tell the judge, or whatever the old thing calls itself, that the wretched account had been paid ages ago.'

'And you imagine he would take your word for it?'

'Don't you, Henry?'

Privately, I am satisfied that any mortal judge, justice, or magistrate, not stone blind, would take my wife's word against that of any cashier in the city of London. At the

same time, it was necessary to impress Miranda with a sense of her need for method. So I said coldly, 'You would, in all probability, be required to pay the account, with legal expenses.'

'Not me!'

'Then *I* should have to pay.'

'Henry, you wouldn't be such a noodle!'

'There is such a place as jail for disobedience, or contempt, of court.'

'Well, I'd rather go to jail than pay any account twice. Indeed, I'd rather go to jail twice than pay some accounts once! Henry, dear, try to keep off milk in the middle of the day!'

I refused to be drawn into a side issue.

'Miranda, let me see the receipt you were going to burn.'

She handed it over. ''Tisn't a receipt—only an account—an idiotic little thing that has been arriving every month for ages.'

I examined the paper.

'It's the Mudford thing you sent a cheque for last year, or the year before, and you kept off the odd ninepence, thinking they would call it discount.'

I continued to examine the account. At the foot of it was written: 'This has been rendered fourteen times.'

'Aren't they funny people?' said Miranda, putting a chocolate cream in her mouth.

'Since they did *not* allow it as discount, why,' said I, 'has not this ninepence been paid? You must pass the shop every other day.'

'That's just the trouble, Henry; I pass so often that I forget to go in. And, you see, I've got used to the account popping into the letter-box.'

'But it's scandalous to think that they have spent sevenpence on rendering an account for ninepence.'

'If they'd stop rendering now, they'd still be twopence to the good. I'm sure to remember to pay it some day. Have a choc!'

'No, thanks.' I sighed wearily and got up. 'There's nothing for it but to send them the money in stamps—now—to-night.'

'Nonsense, Henry! Don't be a tump! You'd have to waste three-ha'pence, too.'

I refrained from replying. My little red stamp-book contained just sufficient to settle the matter. I laid on the table three three-halfpenny, three penny, and three half-penny stamps.

'That's right!' observed Miranda; 'confuse the cashier!'

After arranging the writing materials, I sat down and wrote a polite note explaining that owing to illness, absence from home, and the carelessness of servants, the account, which I enclosed, had been overlooked. I used an envelope with an embossed stamp.

'Give them my fondest love,' said Miranda, with another chocolate cream in her mouth. But she became serious when I began to put on my boots. 'Henry, you're not going to the post on this awful night!'

'It may serve to remind you to be a little more methodical in future,' I gently returned.

It was truly an awful night, lashing wet; and our house is not conveniently situated for the pillar-box; but principle knows no weather.

When I got back, Miranda had a tumbler of delicious Russian tea ready for me. She is not, as I trust you perceive, entirely lacking in method—just as I, as I freely confessed after the tea, am not entirely dominated thereby.

Because, you see, when I came to put away the writing materials, I found, under the blotting-paper, ninepence in stamps.

THE WHALE.

(From *The Whalers.*)

THE gray sea swells wearily, almost lifelessly, the gray atmosphere is chill, clammy, disheartening; through a rift in the gray curtain of fog lies a glimmer of gray ice. And a gray living thing, parting the sea's surface, emits, with a hissing, snoring noise, a lofty spreading jet of gray vapour, glides forward, bulges upward, slides downward, and vanishes beneath oily eddies, to reappear presently a hundred yards away.

In the intervals between the long-drawn blasts of the gray living thing are heard but two sounds—the faint, constant groaning of the swell on the distant ice, and a muffled, rapid, regular throbbing that is not of nature.

As the throbbing grows plainer, a shape is born in the mist, dim, uncertain at first, but soon distinguishable as a ship. She is a small black steamer, no more than ninety feet in length, with a tall, thin funnel and two masts; she is high bowed, and so deep at the stern that the propeller leaves little foam on the troubled gray. The foremast

carries a narrow white barrel, from which appears a man's shoulders and head, also a hand in a thick woollen fingerless glove, gesticulating, pointing. In her bows is a foot-high platform supporting a short swivel cannon painted scarlet. From the muzzle protrudes a weapon pointed with a slim cast-iron shell and furnished with four hinged barbs, now folded against the shaft, four feet of which are within the cannon. Under the muzzle, and overhanging the stem, is a tray bearing about fifty fathoms of four-inch cable, an end of which is fastened to a ring in the slotted shaft of the weapon. And, with his hand on the wooden stock whereby the cannon is manipulated, stands a man whose whole attention is directed upon the sea immediately ahead.

His tanned countenance is almost lost in a grizzled beard; his blue eyes are sunken deep in their wrinkled sockets. A shabby fur cap protects his head, a heavy fur waistcoat with sleeves warms his body; ancient pepper-and-salt trousers, patched and stained, and sea-boots cover his nether limbs. Now and then with his free arm he signals, without turning his head, to the steersman in the box high in front of the

funnel, and the steersman alters the course or mutters into the speaking-tube on his right.

The throbbing slows; it ceases. The steamer slips onward in a cautious, stealthy fashion. Fifty fathoms ahead a shadowy bulk moves leisurely from the depths to the surface. The man aloft cries out and points. The gunner nods; his feet take a grip of the spars on the platform; he bends forward. A few yards behind him a man grasps the lever of one of the two powerful winches. Other men come forward and stand watching the sea ahead.

Now there is no sound save the far-off groaning, for the steamer, her way diminishing, is travelling with the swell and moving noiselessly. But the quietness is short-lived.

Not twenty fathoms away the surface parts; the head of the gray living thing appears; the gray jet shoots up with its accompanying snore. The head sinks; out and up heave the great shoulders and back. The gunner takes what seems an interminable aim at the streaming flank. . . . At last his forefinger twitches.

An orange flame spurts into the gray; a crash shocks the atmosphere; the little

steamer shudders as though she had run against a rock; through the white reek fly wads and whirling coils of hemp, and under the bows the sea boils and surges. The gray living thing has gone. A dulled thump comes up from the depths.

There is a rumble, a clank of machinery, as the cable flows from the winch and over the bow wheel. The propeller thuds; the steamer begins to go slowly astern. The gunner steps from the platform, but keeps an eye on the cable. A couple of seamen come forward to sponge out and reload the gun. The look-out, the steersman, and the winch-man remain on the alert.

At the end of that yellow cable, fathoms and fathoms below that sullen gray surface, the most stupendous of things created — leviathan himself — stricken sore, struggles and strains for dear life . . . in vain.

A PREACHER.

A CORNER of the street he made
His chapel; there he stood at eve,
Bareheaded, whilst he sang and prayed
And called on sinners to believe.

A little crowd would gather round—
Tired workers, idlers, women wan—
To hear how Christ with thorns was crowned
And scourged and crucified for man.

Not that it gave them joy to hear
The preacher tell it; they had heard
The tale so oft within the year,
They almost knew it word for word:

Not that it brought them peace to hark
To prayers put up in faith and love.
The prayers went up, but in the dark
It seemed that they were lost above.

For there were some who said: 'Well, well,
Without a doubt his heart is good.
But we—what is this Heav'n, this Hell?—
We want for only fire and food.'

And some were sullen—they had known
The sweets of life in earlier days;
And others jeered and mocked his tone,
And laughed awhile, and went their ways.

And some were famished, and they cursed
And mouthed at him: 'Does Christ give bread?'

And there were girls, alack! who nursed
Lean babes. . . . Ah! God knows what
they said.

But none came to his side and wept
And caught his hands and cried for light;
None from the circle softly crept,
Half-shamed, with eyes grown gently
bright.

Throughout the springtide's chilly dusks,
Throughout the summer's sickly heat,
He sought for fruit among the husks
That gathered in the dingy street.

Within his bare-walled room at night
He, quivering, knelt and made his prayer:
'O God! O God! give me the right
To lead a lost soul to Thy care.'

It was his life. His blood and brain
Were warmed and wakeful with desire
To strive with Evil; for the pain
Of One had set his soul on fire.

At last a fever seized on him,
And for a while his mind was lost.
Within his lodging poor and dim,
Ill-tended, unrelieved, he tossed.

Thro' dreadful nights he lay and moaned,
With none to comfort—no, not one;
He dreamed that he had been disowned
By God himself, by Christ the Son.

A vision came! Hell ope'd its maw
And showed him vivid scenes of pain.
Weeping, among the damned he saw
The souls his voice had called in vain.

They pointed at him, writhing, drunk
With agony, they wailed his name;
They cursed him. . . . All his hope was shrunk
And withered now—*he* was to blame.

'Twas twilight when his mind returned
From wandering in the shadow land;
Yet fitfully the fever burned,
By woe and want and weakness fanned.

And still the horror of his dream
Wrought pitilessly in his brain.
There was but one pale, hopeful gleam—
God left him life to preach again.

And as he lay and prayed he heard
The bells tell out the time—seven tolls:
It was his hour to speak the Word,
His hour to call on straying souls.

A terror struck him! What if he
Went up to meet God all alone,
If God should say: 'Who comes with thee?'
How should he answer, 'Lord, not one'?

The very fever strengthened him.
A trembling, grizzled, ghostly thing,
He rose and groped about the dim
And chilly chamber, murmuring.

Then forth he crept; and ah! the street
Blazed in his eyes; and in his ears
The ceaseless traffic boomed and beat,
Rough music, lost, it seemed, for years.

Oh, joy, oh, life, to walk the way
With worldly women, worldly men!
Oh, ecstasy to preach, to pray,
To fight the devil once again!

He ran, he reeled, he paused for breath.
The fire within him urged him on—
'Not yet a little while, O Death!
At darkest night there shall be dawn!'

And as he neared the accustomed place
One came to meet him, one with hands
Outstretched, and eyes alight with Grace,
And mouth made sweet by Love's demands,

And voice that cried: 'Ah! it is thou,
Friend, friend, that showed the heav'nly way.
Long time I heard in vain, but now,
Oh, friend, the dark is turned to day!'

The preacher wavered, fell, lay still. . . .
A moment in his tired eyes shone
A wondrous light; a sigh, a thrill,
Passed his pale lips—'Lord, not alone!'

LITTLE BOY.

(From *Kiddies.*)

BILLY had not walked far in the wood when he came to a high wall. It had a forbidding look, and he would have turned back had he not noticed a gate in it—a gate made of iron bars; and, as everybody knows, such a gate is so designed in order that little boys may peep through it. Billy, with vague thoughts of an ogre's castle, approached on tiptoe and peeped through. Then he was glad he had come.

He gazed upon a lovely, large garden, with high walls round it. In the wall opposite was a green door, and beyond it the upper part of a great house. The walls

of the garden were covered with fruit trees, many in blossom, white and pink, but the garden itself was filled with flowers. Some of the flowers, especially the narcissus, were familiar to Billy, for he and his mother—it seemed very long ago now—used to buy them in a city street. There was a great bed of them in the centre of the garden. And on the path around the bed walked a lady all in black.

At sight of her Billy drew back, but as she did not notice him, he went close to the bars once more. She was a beautiful lady, quite young, and her hair was yellow like his own. Slowly she walked and never raised her eyes from the path — or was it the narcissus bed? Sometimes she clasped her hands in front of her, and Billy saw little flashes in the sunshine. Sometimes she let them fall, as though they were tired. Billy began to wonder why she never looked up. Was she sorry about something? He began to feel sorry himself.

All at once he was reminded of his lost mother. Grief came upon him like a black cloud. He cried out, choked, turned, took two steps, and sank upon the turf, his face on his arms, his little body shaking.

The beautiful lady had looked up at last.

For a moment it seemed as though she were going to run away. Then, with a pale face, she came swiftly to the gate. 'Little boy,' she whispered, 'what is the matter?'

Amid the sobs that would not be subdued came the broken, desperate cry, 'Oh, mother—mother!'

And at that the beautiful lady became paler still, and wavered, and clutched at the bar of the gate.

'Wait, little boy; wait till I get the key,' she said. 'The gate has not been open for so long . . . so long.'

She ran to a summer-house not far off. At the door she hesitated, as if afraid. Yet there was nothing terrible in the summer-house—there was nothing at all, except a little bow and sheaf of arrows hanging on the wall. At last, with her hand to her heart, she entered and came back with the key.

The neglected lock resisted, but she forced the key round and dragged the gate open. Billy was getting to his feet.

'Don't run away; don't be afraid, little boy,' she said, noting the ill-fitting black clothes which Billy was 'wearing out' before he should grow too big for them.

'What is the matter? Have you hurt yourself? Did you fall? Tell me, little boy.'

'Oh, mother!' he sobbed again, his face in his hands, his shoulders heaving. Blindly he sought to go, but her hand fell softly on his arm.

'Little boy,' she whispered; 'little boy——' Her voice failed.

She slipped to her knees; her arm went round him. She quivered as with pain.

Billy felt himself being drawn to her—close—closer yet. He did not resist. He yielded. He allowed her to take his hands from his face—allowed her to wipe away his tears with a soft, sweet-smelling hanky. And then, somehow, his face was against her bosom, and both her arms were round him, and her hand was patting him tenderly. And, while yet he sobbed, a most wonderful peace fell upon him, a most exquisite sense of comfort grew in his heart.

But suddenly he became aware that the beautiful lady, the stranger, was crying too. He didn't know what to do, and he couldn't say anything. But his arms, of their own accord, went round her as far as they could reach, and clung.

'Oh, little boy,' she sighed; 'my little boy!'

JOHNNY LAD.

WE'RE gettin' auld, Johnny and me; but I could thole that, if it wasna that Johnny is gettin' auld faur, faur quicker nor masel'.

Maybe, like a heap o' ither strange things, it'll be explained some day; but to me, noo, it's the maist un-understandable thing that a dog, wi' a' his wiceness and guidness, is grantit sae few years in this warld. Ay, and the love and faithfulness o' a dog! The maister, though he's an oot-and-oot blaggaird, can dae nae wrang. And the kindly company o' a dog! What would I ha'e done, since Mary gaed awa', wantin' Johnny?

Whiles I fancy Johnny kens a' aboot it. I ha'e been tell't—I ha'e read it in prent—that a dog doesna think. Weel, weel, believe that, if it pleases ye. In ma opeenion there's folk that think less—except o' theirsel's—than the puirest wee mongrel.

At nicht, when the wark's ower, I'll be sittin' at the fireside, readin' the paper and smokin' ma pipe; and Johnny'll be lyin'

on the rug, quate and, maybe, dozin'. And then, for nae reason a man could see, Johnny rises. Maybe I 'm no' aware till I feel him close agin ma knee, wi' his nose seekin' ma haun'. For Johnny 's blin', puir lad, though to see him gaun aboot, ye could scarce tell it.

Aweel, I pit aside the paper, and there he is, lookin' up wi' his kind, sichtless e'en to ma face. It couldna hurt me sairer if he was cryin' oot. Whiles I canna speak to him—jist lay ma haun' on his heid and haud it there. Ay, whiles there maun be something wrang wi' ma ain sicht, for I canna see him clear.

And I seem to hear him sayin', 'Oh, maister, be tender wi' me. It 'll no' be lang noo.'

And to masel' I 'm sayin', 'Oh, Johnny lad, what 'll I dae wantin' ye?'

THE DREAM.

THE old man turned in his chair. 'Can ye no' sit doon an' rest ye?' he cried. 'Ye 've been dancin' aboot the hale nicht, like a hen on a het girdle!'

His wife ceased her occupation of re-arranging the dishes above the dresser. 'I didna think I was disturbin' ye, Alick,' she said gently, slowly crossing the kitchen floor and taking her seat by the fire opposite her husband. 'I was just reddin' up. It's Seturday nicht, ye ken.'

'"Reddin'-up!" I've been watchin' ye, an' ye've done naething but fiddle-faddle wi' things since eicht o'clock. But ye sudna be aye on yer feet, wife,' he said, his voice softening. 'Ye maun keep in mind what the doctor said. What was makin' ye restless? Are ye no' weel, Mary?'

'I never felt better, Alick.' She looked up at the clock, the old 'wag-at-the-wa'.'

'And ye've been keekin' at the nock every twa-three meenutes since sax o'clock, as if ye was wearyin' for yer bed-time. Is onything disturbin' ye?'

She did not reply, but rose and went to the dresser, where she began to polish the shining pot-lids.

'Tits, wumman!' exclaimed he. 'What's ado wi' ye?'

She gave a little tremulous laugh. 'I forgot I had polished them a'ready,' she said, and came back to her seat.

Alick produced his pipe and a piece of

tobacco. He cut the tobacco mechanically, eyeing his companion the while.

Presently she took a brush from the corner of the hearth and proceeded to sweep the pipe-clayed stone.

'Guidsake!' cried the man, with a half laugh; 'ye're soopin' at naething! There's no' a grain o' dirt on the stane. What's come ower yer knittin' the nicht, Mary?'

From the bag hanging behind her chair she brought a sock and a ball of wool.

'That's better!' said Alick. 'I dinna ken ye at this time o' nicht wi'oot yer knittin'. Never heed the time,' he added, catching her glancing at the clock. 'Wull I read to ye?'

She did not reply. Her knitting was lying in her lap; she seemed to have forgotten it. She sat in a rigid attitude, bent forward, her worn hands clasped on her knees. Her wrinkled face seemed pale in the lamp-light, and her eyes were too bright.

'Wife, are ye shair there's naething wrang wi' ye?'

There was distress, alarm, in the husband's voice. She roused herself. Her eyes met his, searched his, and fell.

'There's naething wrang wi' me, Alick,'

she said, slowly, 'but——' Once more she glanced at the clock.

'But what, Mary?'

She hesitated. 'I'm feart—to tell ye,' she whispered at last.

'Feart to tell me?'

'But I've got to tell ye.' She paused, as if to gain courage.

'I'm no' askin' ye to tell me onything ye dinna want to tell.' His voice had become a little hard.

'But I've got to tell ye, dearie,' she said, crushing her hands together. 'I've had a —dream.'

'A dream?'

'Ay—aboot John.'

She bent lower, awaiting his words. But none came. His lips were tightly closed, and his weather-beaten face seemed to have grown suddenly older. A minute passed without sound save the ticking of the clock and the rustle of the fire. And again she looked at the clock.

'Alick,' she began, with difficulty of speech—'Alick, it's fifteen year the nicht since John gaed awa', an' I've obeyed ye a' the time. I've never spoke his name. Is that no' the truth?'

Her husband nodded unwillingly. His

eyes were fixed on the fire, and his expression was bitter.

She sighed and continued, 'Fifteen year I 've obeyed ye, but noo — oh, Alick, has fifteen year no' made ony difference in—in yer he'rt? Can ye no' forgi'e him?'

'If ye maun say onything on that subjec', say it quick an' be done wi' 't,' he said coldly.

With the back of her hand she wiped her eyes; then dropped the hand to its former position against the other. 'I'll say it quick, Alick. . . . I had a — dream. I dreamed that John had come hame.' She looked eagerly at her man's face. It whitened, but the mouth remained firmly set. 'I had a dream that John had come hame,' she repeated.

'Dream nae mair, wife,' he muttered sternly. 'There 's nae hame here for the wastrel that near ruined us. He wudna ha'e the face to come back.'

'The Prodigal Son had the face to come back to his fayther,' said Mary tremulously.

'He hadna near ruined his fayther—only hissel' was ruined. Whereas, John——' He stopped short. After fifteen years he, too, had uttered the name of his son.

'I think the Prodigal wud ha'e been received whatever he had done,' said the wife softly. 'Alick, dearie, dinna be angered at me for tellin' ye ma dream. It was a rale beautifu' dream, for John cam' hame—he cam' hame to ask yer paurdon for a' the trouble he had caused ye, an' to strive an' work to repay ye for a' he had cost ye; an', oh, Alick! ye—ye ran to meet him!' Her voice failed her.

'For the love o' God, say nae mair!' the man cried passionately. 'I 'm sair vexed for ye, Mary. But dinna let a dream deceive ye, for I tell ye again what I tell't ye fifteen year syne: I canna paurdon him. I couldna speak to him if he was staunin' afore me. If it hadna been for him, ye wud be sittin' this nicht in a bonny hoose, wi' a braw bit gairden roon' aboot it, enjoyin' plenty o' comforts in yer auld age. Instead o' that, ye 've got to bide in this puir wee but an' ben, wi' scarce enough butter to yer breid. I tell ye, the thocht o' 't drives me near mad; an' whiles, when I see ye that hard-wrocht an' that wearit, wi' never a bairn to think o' but the twa puir wee innocents in the kirkyaird—oh, then I could curse——'

'Na, na, dearie! Ye maunna say that,'

she whispered soothingly. 'I'm as weel aff as ever I want to be. I need naething. We've a heap to be thankfu' for. . . . Oh, Alick, it's hauf-past nine!' she cried suddenly, and was seized with a trembling.

'Ay, so it is,' said her husband. 'It's no' that late; but ye best gang to yer bed. Are ye cauld, Mary?'

She shook her head, shuddering. 'Dearie!' she moaned, regarding him with feverish eyes.

He made to rise, but her gesture checked him.

'Bide there, Alick,' she said imploringly, unsteadily. 'I've mair to tell ye. If ye was to hear that John was—was deid, wud ye no' try to paurdon——?'

'Deid! John deid!' The old man sank back in the arm-chair. Pipe, knife, and tobacco slipped unnoticed from his fingers.

'Na, na, dearie! Ye're no' to think that!' cried his wife. 'For John's alive an' weel—it was in ma dream. An' oh! forgi'e me, forgi'e me the lee I've been tellin' ye. For I hadna ony dream ava. I——'

'Wife!' he exclaimed. He lowered his voice. 'Wha's that at the door at this time o' nicht?'

For a space the old woman remained as if frozen. The man rose. The tap was repeated. With a rending sob, she fell on her knees before him. 'I tell't ye a lee,' she gasped. 'I had nae dream, but I had a—*letter*. Oh, Alick!'

The old man clutched at the back of his chair. He swayed slightly. 'Wha's at the door?' he demanded hoarsely.

'John! Oh, Alick, dearie——'

Then she nerved herself, and looked up in his face . . . and thanked God.

'Ma son—ma son!' he sighed, and went stumblingly, eagerly, to open the door. 'Ma son—ma son!'

FELLOW-TRAVELLERS.

(From *Some Plain, Some Coloured.*)

'COME on, Sandy!' The weary traveller, old and shabby, turned to encourage the weary dog, a brown spaniel of disreputable appearance. 'Come on, Sandy! We're there at last—back to the place where I was born—and not much change in the village after forty years. Come on, Sandy!'

Before them was an old cottage, modernised, spick and span as tradesmen could make it. It stood in a garden, the last word in orderliness, and gay with flowers.

'Cousin William has become a gardener,' the traveller remarked. 'There's hope for us, Sandy.'

In the doorway of the cottage a tall gray man was standing, but he did not acknowledge the traveller's diffident salute. When, however, the wayfarers reached the green iron gate, he shouted warningly, 'Bide where ye are! Don't ye open that gate!' He came down the path. 'No dogs allowed in here! What d'ye want?'

'Why, William, don't ye know me?' The traveller, smiling, offered his hand over the gate.

William started, then took it gingerly. 'Are—are ye John Welson?'

'That's me! Dare say I've changed more than you. But I knew ye at once, William.'

'Never had a memory for faces.' William glanced furtively at his cousin's clothing and the canvas package. 'So ye—ye decided to come North?'

'I did—though I should tell ye, William, that my employer changed his mind and

offered me a lighter job if I would stop. But I had got the notion to see the old place once more and — well, I hope ye understand.'

William's expression did not betoken much understanding. He frowned, pursed his mouth, looked this way and that, and finally said, 'There's such a thing as dropping the bone for the shadow.'

'Oh, don't be saying that, William!' cried John Welson. 'Ye know your letter promised ye would find a job for me—or almost promised.'

'Yes, yes! But ye've been over rash, John, and been at great expense, too, which, I fear, ye could ill afford.'

'That's very true. I'm worth fourpence at the moment, William. We took the train half the way and tramped the rest—two hundred mile. A long road — eh, Sandy?'

Sandy, who during the conversation had been lying down, muzzle on paws, looked up at his master and wagged assent.

William choked back an oath. 'Are ye telling me ye brought that animal all the way?'

'Why, William, what else could I do? I've had Sandy eight years.'

'Oh, I thought ye might ha' picked up a stray on the road.'

'Sandy a stray!' John Welson checked his indignation. 'Come, come, William; when you and Sandy are better acquaint ye'll appreciate his quality, even if ye're not fond o' dogs as a rule.'

'Ye should have warned me ye thought o' bringing a dog wi' ye.'

'Oh, but no preparations are needed for Sandy. Like myself, he's glad to take what's going. I doubt if he'd have took to a kennel, supposing ye had got one ready for him. He's used to the house, and a better-behaved dog never lay at a fireside. So what do ye say, William, to openin' the gate and letting us talk it over? As ye may imagine, Sandy and me are about done.'

'The dog does not come into my garden'—there was a distressing silence—'much less into my house,' William declared. 'Ye'll have to get quit o' him before we can come to any arrangement.'

'Get quit o' Sandy!' It was a whisper of sheer stupefaction.

'Ye're my cousin, and I'll do what I can for ye; but I draw the line at a dog.'

Partly recovering his wits, John Welson regarded his kinsman with a pathetic smile.

'Give Sandy a chance,' he said. 'Let him rest at your fireside for an hour, and I'll wager ye'll wish he was your own!' He turned to the spaniel. 'Up, Alexander, and shake hands wi' the kind gentleman!'

Sandy got up, approached the bars of the gate, and hesitated.

'Keep your distance!' snapped William.

'Oh, man, ye surely can't be afeard o' Sandy, the gentlest in the world? Look at his eyes—the loving-kindness in them!'

'That's enough! Are ye going to get quit o' him?'

'How could I do that?'

'Have ye a licence for him?'

'Who would ask a gentleman like Sandy for a licence?' John Welson tried to laugh.

'Then I'll have to get the constable,' said William.

'What! Do ye mean that?' cried his cousin, as though he had been struck in the face.

'Ye are welcome to my house—for the present—but I'll take in no dog. And that's flat—final!'

For a moment or two the poor man

gazed straight at the prosperous. Then, 'Come on, Sandy!' he said, and turned away.

'Don't be a fool,' William called after him. 'Get quit o' the dog, and I'll do what I can for ye. Keep him, and I'll see to it that ye get never a job in these parts.'

'Come on, Sandy! Four hundred mile—but we can do it—together. Come on, Sandy!' said John Welson, increasing his pace. He was pale and shaking.

And so these fellow-travellers took the road back. When they could trudge no longer they found refuge, without permission, in an outhouse; and there they slept.

In the middle of the night John Welson awoke. The dog was whining softly.

'Cold, Sandy? Ay, it's cold—yet not so cold as the charity o' a kinsman. But we'll think on the charity o' God, Sandy, and o' strangers, and somehow we'll win to the journey's end. Get quit o' ye, Sandy? God forgive him for that!'

Sandy licked the comforting hand, and again there was silence, and anon slumber.

The moon, looking in through the paneless window, saw only a weary, shabby old

man and a weary, disreputable-looking dog lying close together. But haply a kinder Eye than the moon's looked in also.

THE SIMPLE SOUL.

THERE was a simple soul who lit
A candle every night,
And in his window tended it,
And worshipped in its light.

'God sets so many lamps for me—
The countless stars above—
Perchance,' he whispered, 'God will see
My little flame of love.'

A wise man came and laughed—'Dear fool,
The stars are spheres more vast
Than this poor planet, now grown cool,
Whereon our lots are cast.

'Let poets frail and children small
Your pretty dream pursue.
The stars are not "God's lamps" at all,
Nor are they set for you.'

He passed. . . . The simple soul, amazed,
Looked after him and sighed . . .
Then sought the shop—the Lord be praised!—
Where candles were supplied.

A PRESENT FOR THE PRIME MINISTER.

(From *Five-and-twenty Turkeys.*)

'STILL more, Phillips?' The Prime Minister lay back in his chair, like a man worn out.

The secretary, laden with documents, hesitated. 'Only this, sir.' He presented an envelope bearing the awkwardly written direction—'The Rev. Prime Minister, c/o the King, London.'

The Premier's frown gave place to a faint smile, which faded as he read the enclosure.

Aster Cottage, Fairport,
Scotland. *3rd October.*

Reverent Sir,—This comes hoping you will excuse my bad writing, but Jean is in her bed, with the lumbago and the sore heart with thinking about our son John. You will maybe have heard about John. He has been in London for years with Martibans, the great engineers. John was always a good lad, but now he has got into disgrace. There was a strike at the works, and fighting, and John hit a man, and they put him in the gaol for thirty days, and the thirty days are near past, and

we don't know what to do. For there was a letter from John, and he is so black ashamed he says we will never see his face no more. And we do not know a friend in London, and I cannot leave Jean, and we don't know what to do. And we was thinking of John in his despair, and thinking if you would speak soft to Mr Martiban to give John another chance, for John was always a good lad. Jean was for writing to the King, but we see from the papers the King is away from London, and so this liberty of writing to you. It is but a word from you would save John, and that is the only hope Jean and me have got. He is our only one, and he was always a good lad. Hoping you will forgive the liberty, Reverent Sir,—Yours respectfully,

PETER MASON.

P.S.—Jean says I must tell you I did not vote for your side at the election, but John was always a good lad.

At the postscript the Prime Minister smiled again, but the smile faded, leaving the rather grim countenance cold and weary as before.

'A pathetic case, Phillips, but we can't interfere in the affairs of a private firm. Besides, there are so many Johns who were always good lads.' He rose and passed to the door. In less than an hour he was due to speak at a great political dinner.

'You would wish me to send merely a formal acknowledgment?' the secretary said.

The Prime Minister nodded and went out, but, being troubled about many things, he omitted to return the letter to Mr Phillips.

It had the honour of lying upon his dressing table until two o'clock the following morning, at which hour the Prime Minister, tired to death and filled with the bitterness of temporal power, read it—he could not have told why—a second time. And when he had finished, he made a note on the envelope, muttering, 'Unofficially, of course—strictly unofficially.'

And in the evening, to the distracted old parents in Scotland came the telegram that seemed like a message from Heaven: 'Everything arranged. Good lad reinstated. Don't worry.'

And next day arrived a letter from the penitent, grateful, and thoroughly puzzled John.

'Oh, wife,' cried Peter Mason, 'what can we dae for the Prime Meenister?'

'Oh, what?' said Jean.

It became the daily, nay, the hourly question. But there seemed to be no satisfactory answer. In their boundless gratitude they

wanted to *give*—yet what had they to give worthy of so great and good a man? The question became a serious worry, an obsession, in fact, which considerably affected their peace of mind and, to some extent, their tempers. However, at the end of a fortnight, an answer came from an unexpected quarter.

On a fine afternoon Peter was working in the garden, and Jean, herself again, was knitting in the porch.

'Oh, wife,' cried Peter, pausing, 'can ye no' think o' *something?*'

And just then, round the corner of the cottage strolled a handsome turkey-cock.

With a shout Peter let fall the spade.

'Jean, Jean, I've got it! We'll gi'e him Weelyum!'

Now William the turkey, William the Fourteenth, was — as had been his predecessors — destined for the Laird's Christmas dinner-table, and it took Peter some persuasion to obtain his wife's agreement. Eventually she gave in on condition that Peter should truthfully and forthwith put the case before the Laird. Which Peter, very ill at ease, duly did, and the Laird, after pretending to be grievously offended, sent him away rejoicing, though poorer for that year by a couple of pounds.

Never was turkey so pampered, and never, when the fatal hour arrived, was a William slain with less compunction.

'Thirty-three pun', five and a hauf ounce,' Peter announced gleefully.

'And to think,' said Jean, with a sudden sob, 'he'll likely never see the Prime Meenister!'

'What dae ye mean, woman?'

'Hoo can we trust Weelyum on that lang journey? He's shair to get lost or stolen.'

Whereupon gloom descended on Aster Cottage. William was to start for London on the morrow, and that night there was little sleep for Peter and Jean, and in the dark morning they rose burdened with doubts. And lo, the postman and a letter from son John, and in the letter a money order for ten pounds!

'He was aye a guid lad,' said Peter—and then looked apoplectic. 'Jean, dae ye no' see what this means? We'll gang wi' Weelyum!'

'Man, are ye daft? Gang wi'——'

'Get ready, get ready! Weelyum's gaun to see the Prime Meenister after a'!'

And so it came to pass that in the gray of the winter morning they stood weary and cold and afraid on the Premier's doorstep.

'If ye please, sir,' said Peter to the man who opened the door, 'we was wantin' to see the Prime Meenister.'

The man, glancing at the huge turkey, answered, kindly enough, 'I'm afraid that's impossible. The Prime Minister is just leaving town.'

As he spoke a big car drew up at the step.

Somehow the dire possibility had never occurred to the old people. Jean's hand sought her husband's arm. Dumb, like children under a crushing disappointment, they turned away.

'What is it, Simmons?'

A young man, carrying a dispatch box, appeared in the doorway.

Simmons explained.

'Stay!' cried the young man, and the old people halted. 'I'm so sorry,' he went on, 'but the Prime Minister has to catch a train. Can I give him any message?'

'Oh, sir,' faltered Jean, 'we jist wanted to thank him, and gi'e him Weelyum.'

'This is Weelyum, sir,' said Peter.

The young man kept grave. 'And what are your names?'

'Peter and Jean Mason.'

'Ah! I seem to remember. . . . And you have come all the way from Scotland?'

'We couldna trust Weelyum to come his lane to the Prime Meenister,' said Peter.

'I see! Please wait. Simmons, ask them to step in.' The young man disappeared. 'All the way from Scotland, sir,' he told his chief, who was drawing on his gloves.

'Bring them in,' said the Prime Minister.

When the Prime Minister offered his hand to Jean, the astounded Peter let fall the turkey.

'Tits, Peter!' she whispered, and went scarlet with confusion.

The secretary placed chairs for them side by side, while the Prime Minister sat down at his writing-table.

There was a pause. Jean gave her man a nudge to remind him that there was need for haste.

Peter, grasping the turkey, rose. He was pale and shaky, but determined to make his speech.

'Reverent Sir—this is Weelyum—and may the Lord bless ye always.'

Helplessly he stood till the Prime Minister took the gift and gently pressed him back upon his chair.

To the secretary the great man said softly,

'We'll take the next train, Phillips. Tell them to serve some breakfast at once, and you might join us.'

A wonderful hour followed, and then the old folks went to find their son.

Once more the Prime Minister drew on his gloves.

'Have you any special instructions respecting the turkey, sir?' the secretary gravely inquired.

'We shall take it to my wife. I almost wish I might have it stuffed, Phillips,' the Prime Minister said, with a short laugh.

'I think you may count on that, sir. It usually happens to turkeys at this season.'

'I wasn't thinking of sage and onions, or whatever they use,' said the Premier, lighting a cigar.

'In a glass case, sir! Wouldn't it be rather a nightmare?'

'To me, Phillips,' the Prime Minister replied, laying the match carefully on the tray, 'it would be the most beautiful reminder in the world.'

THE PIE IN THE OVEN.*

(From *All Ages.*)

AS his spouse entered the kitchen, Mr John McNab, seated in his arm-chair, turned a lowering countenance from the bright fire. 'Where the mischief ha'e ye been?' he demanded. 'Are we to ha'e nae supper the nicht?'

'I was jist at the gate,' she mildly replied, 'lookin' to see if I couldna hear Flora comin' up the road wi' the constable.' The table in the middle of the floor was already laid, more elaborately than usual, for the evening meal.

'Tits, Susie!' he exclaimed irritably, 'can ye no' ca' him "polisman" an' be done wi''t?'

'Flora likes us to ca' him "constable."'

He grunted and proceeded to relight his pipe. 'Weel,' he said between puffs, 'did ye hear the polisman comin' up the road?'

'Na, John; but——'

'In that case, he'll no' be within a mile

* *The Pie in the Oven*—Play in one act (Gowans & Gray: Glasgow).

o' the hoose. So we 'd best tak' oor supper, you an' me. Eh?'

'We canna tak' oor supper afore Flora an' the constable come.'

'What wey that?'

Mrs McNab stepped over to the hearth-rug. 'Come, come, John, ye ken fine what's bringin' the constable, dacent lad, here the nicht! It 's nae great blame to him that he 's backward in comin' forward. It 's jist his modesty. So ye 'll gi'e him a wee bit encouragement to say his say—eh, John?'

'Encouragement! Guidsake, Susie! ha'e ye nae pride? D'ye think I 'm gaun to let the man imagine I 'm wantin' to get quit o' Flora, the only bairn we 've got left? No' likely!'

'But Flora 's willin'.' Mrs McNab stooped to open the door of the oven. A most appetising odour drifted forth. 'Ay, Flora 's willin', and so am I. An' so are you, John, if ye wud but confess it to yoursel'.'

'When did I say I was willin'?' He paused and sniffed. 'What ha'e ye got in the oven, wife?'

'Oh, jist a pie.'

'A pie!' (Sniff, sniff.) 'That 's guid! Is 't ready, Susie?'

'Ay, it's ready; but it'll keep till they come.' She shut the door, rose, and went over to the dresser.

Mr McNab sat up. 'But I want ma supper noo! I'm terrible hungry.'

'I'm sure they'll no' be long. And maybe the constable'll no' be sae bashfu' the nicht, puir lad.'

'Bah! The man hasna the pluck o' a hen. A—what kin' o' a pie did ye say it was?'

'Ye'll see when the time comes, John,' she replied, removing the bread on its platter to the table. 'Promise ye'll gi'e him a chance. Three times has he come here to ask ye for Flora——'

'An' sat like a stuffed owl till it was time to gang to oor beds! If he wants Flora, he can ask for her like a man!' Mr McNab rose. 'I'll awa' ootbye an' see if there's ony sign o' her.'

Left to herself, Mrs McNab sighed and smiled, murmuring, 'Aweel, I'm no' gaun to thole it ony longer. It's *got* to be settled the nicht.'

Presently the outer door was banged, and Mr McNab re-entered the kitchen. 'They're footerin' awa' at the gate. I suppose the man's feart to come in.' He strode over to

the fire. 'I micht as weel get oot the pie, an' we'll be ready to mak' a start.'

'Wheesht, man, wheesht! I hear them comin'.' She sped across to the oven, opened the door, and peered in. 'It's maybe jist a wee thing ower het,' she remarked. 'I'll leave the door open an inch.' She rose. 'My! but it's a bonny smell; is't no,' John? Ay, there they are!'

Flora's voice was heard. 'Hing yer hat on that nail, Peter, an' here's a place for yer walkin'-stick.' (Sounds of a hat and stick falling.)

'Oh dear, but ye're clumsy! Let them lie. Gang ben.'

Peter's voice replied, 'Aw, thenk ye, Flora—thenk ye; but I doot it's ower late. I—I'll bid ye guid-nicht, Flora.'

Mrs McNab flew to the door and threw it open. 'Come awa' ben, Maister Duff,' she said hospitably. 'We're gled to see ye.'

Assisted by some propulsion from the maiden, Peter crossed the threshold. His height was six feet two; he looked miserable and flustered in proportion. He shook hands feebly with the hostess.

'Kin' o' cauld the nicht, is it no'?' she affably remarked.

'Ay, it's kin' o' cauld, as ye say. It is that.' He moved nervously toward the host. 'Ay, it's kin' o' cauld. Ay! I hope ye're weel, Maister McNab; I hope——'

Mr McNab granted a brief handshake. 'Sit doon, sit doon,' he said shortly, and turned to his daughter. 'Ye're late, lassie.'

'Am I?' she answered lightly over her shoulder. 'Peter, tak' a sate.'

'Aw, thenk ye,' said the constable tremulously; 'but it's time I was gettin' doon the road.'

Mrs McNab placed a chair, rather a low one, for him. 'Hoots, Maister Duff! Ye maun bide an' tak' a bit o' supper wi' us.'

'Aw, thenk ye,' was the reply, delivered with the smile of an expiring martyr; 'but I'd best be gettin' doon the road.'

'Siddoon, man!' thundered Mr McNab.

The constable went down with a crash, all but toppling from the chair.

'Faythe r!' whispered Flora reproachfully.

He turned an unexpectedly pleasant countenance upon her. 'Weel, ma lass, I'm sure you an' Maister Duff are ready for yer suppers this cauld nicht.' He transferred the beam to the visitor. 'Ye'll be fair famishin'—eh, Maister Duff?'

Peter started. 'Me? Aw, as sure's death, Maister McNab, I couldna eat a bite.' He wilted under the other's sudden scowl.

Flora turned to her mother. 'Is the supper ready? I'm as hungry as a hawk.'

At that her father grinned once more and rubbed his hands. 'That's richt, Flora! Ye'll find a pie in the oven.'

Mrs McNab smiled placidly. 'Dinna heed the pie the noo, Flora. Rin awa' an' tak' aff yer things, an' I'll see aboot the supper—when the time comes.'

With a glance at Peter, who appeared to be dead to the world, Flora left the kitchen.

'Mercy!' exclaimed Mrs McNab; 'I forgot to tell her something. John, you an' Maister Duff can ha'e a smoke an' a crack till I come back.' She went quickly to the door.

Peter rose in a panic. 'Aw, it's time I was gettin'——'

'Siddoon!' snapped the host, and Peter flopped a second time. 'See here, Susie, I'm famishin'! Let's ha'e oor supper wi'oot ony mair palaver.'

'Ye'll get yer supper'—she went out—'*when the time comes.*' The door closed.

With a gesture of impotent wrath Mr McNab threw himself back in his chair, glowering at the guest, who sat motionless, staring at his feet. In a little while, however, he moved his chair forward, and, bending over the arm, sniffed at the aroma stealing from the oven. Then he sat up and relighted his pipe.

A groan came from the constable.

Mr McNab leaned toward him, saying slowly and distinctly, 'Did ye speak?'

'Eh?'

'I'm sayin', did ye speak?'

'Na—oh, na, na.'

'I thocht ye was maybe tryin' for to say something.'

Mr McNab smoked for half-a-minute. 'It's been a fine day,' he remarked. 'I'm sayin', it's been a fine day.'

'A fine day—so it has.' The constable shuddered.

'If ye're cauld,' said the host, 'draw in to the fire.'

'Aw, thenk ye.' Peter moved his chair a couple of inches. 'I'm no' exac'ly cauld.' He took out his handkerchief and wiped his brow.

'Dod, ye're sweatin', man!'

'Ay, I'm sweatin', but I'm no' exac'ly

warm either.' Peter transferred the handkerchief to his neck. 'It's a sort o' cauld sweat.' He blew his nose, coughed, wiped his brow again and put away his handkerchief. He then sought to twist his ankles together, and gripped the bottom of the chair with both hands as though afraid of being drawn into space. Presently he spoke, with an obvious effort. 'As ye observed, it's been a fine day. If—if it hadna been a fine day, I—I was gaun to ask ye, Maister McNab—I'm sayin', Maister McNab, I was gaun to ask ye a—an important question.' He got out his handkerchief again.

'Noo it's comin'!' thought Mr McNab. He sat erect, laid aside his pipe, pulled down his waistcoat, and assumed an attitude of stern attention. 'Ye was sayin'?'

'I was gaun to—to ask ye——'

'I'm listenin', Maister Duff; I'm listenin'.' The listener hooked his thumbs into his waistcoat armholes and looked perfectly terrifying.

Peter writhed. 'I was gaun to ask ye—Oh, ma gracious goodness!'

Mr McNab, either from compunction or from a certain sense of guilt, removed his gaze to the ceiling. 'Ye was sayin' ye

was gaun to ask me—Weel, what was the question aboot, Maister Duff?'

'Aw, it was aboot—it was aboot—that coo o' yours that was badly.'

Mr McNab fell back. 'The coo's deid,' he snapped.

'Oh, dear me! I'm vexed to hear that, Maister McNab! But I—I hope the ither beasts is—in guid health.'

'I ha'ena heard them complainin'.'

'That's nice.' Peter mopped his face. 'An' the p-p-poultry?'

'There's naething wrang wi' the poultry.'

'Oh, that's gratifyin'—extremely gratifyin'! An' the p-pigs?'

'They're fine,' said the host, barely restraining himself.

'Oh, that's splendid! It's splendid when the pigs is fine. An' ye're keepin' brawly yersel', I hope?'

But this was too much for Mr McNab. 'Ach, man, haud yer tongue an' gi'e yer brain a rest!'

Peter recoiled and bowed his head in his hands just as Mrs McNab came briskly into the kitchen. She passed swiftly to the oven, examined the contents, and shut the door with a dubious wag of the head which did not escape her husband. 'Aweel,'

she said resignedly, as she retired, 'if the pie's ruined, I suppose it canna be helped.'

'Susie,' implored Mr McNab, 'what's the use o' a' this palaver? Wud it no' be faur better to——'

Ignoring him, she disappeared.

'Susie! Susie! Oh! this is no' to be endured!' He addressed himself to the unhappy guest. 'I'm sayin', this is no' to be endured, Maister Duff.'

'Ah,' groaned Peter, 'it's hellish.'

'What? I thocht ye said ye wasna hungry?'

'Hungry?'

'Tits, man! dae ye no' smell the pie?'

'Whatna pie?'

'Whatna pie, ye gowk!' Mr McNab leaned over and opened the oven door. 'The pie in the oven—see!'

'Aw,' said the constable stupidly, 'is that a pie?'

'I thocht a polisman,' the host observed with extreme bitterness, 'wud ken a pie when he seen it! Can ye no' smell it?'

'I—I'll try,' said Peter, making to rise.

'Keep yer sate! Can ye no' smell it where ye are?'

'Ay, I think'—sniff—'I smell it!'

'If ye was pittin' less pomade on yer

hair——' Mr McNab began, and checked himself. 'Weel, wud ye say the pie was burnin'? Na, na, I dinna mean on fire! Does it *smell* burnin'—or singein'?'

Peter appeared to consider. 'I couldna say which,' he answered at last, and once more employed his handkerchief. 'Aw, me!' he murmured in his misery.

Rising abruptly, Mr McNab kicked the oven door to. 'I'll stand it nae longer!' he grunted. Delaying only to shake his clenched fist above the unseeing guest, he strode across the floor, and flung open the door. 'Susie!'

'I hear ye,' replied his wife, without appearing. 'Has onything happened?'

'The pie's burnin'!'

'Aweel, I canna help that. But here's Flora comin'.—Flora, rin an' see what yer fayther's wantin'.'

The girl came hurrying into the kitchen.

'What is it, fayther? Has he—has he said onything?'

'Na, an' never will! But the pie's burnin'!'

Flora sighed and went to the oven. He followed her.

'Tak' it oot noo, like a guid lass,' he said softly, 'an' we'll a' ha'e oor supper.'

She shook her head and closed the oven, remarking, 'Na, it's no' burnin'—yet!'

'Guidsake! Are we to wait till it's brunt?'

'Looks like it!'

He strode, furious, to the door. 'Susie! Susie!'

Flora halted behind the abject Peter and whispered, 'For ony favour be a man!'

'I—I canna!'

With a gesture of despair she fled, slipping past her angry father in the doorway, who bawled after her, 'Tell yer mither, if she doesna gi'e me ma supper instanter, I —I'll kill somebody!'

Slamming the door, he returned to his chair and sat down with a grunt. 'What a terrible thing a female can be when she gets a notion in her heid! See here, young man, never you seek to get marrit!'

'Oh, certainly not—certainly not!'

'*What?*'

'I meant for to say—aw, I canna say it. But, Maister McNab, supposin' I was to ask ye—respectfully ask ye to'—gulp—'guess what I'm thinkin' aboot the noo.'

It must be confessed that Mr McNab was considerably taken aback. 'Guess what ye're thinkin' aboot!' He stroked his

beard. 'Na, young man, I ha'e nae desire to guess what ye're thinkin' aboot the noo.'

'Then,' said Peter, in utter despair, 'Heaven help me!'

'They say that Heaven helps them that helps theirsel's.' And in the same instant Mr McNab was struck by an idea inspired by his own remark. 'By jings!' He smote his fist upon his palm. 'Duff,' he commanded in a sharp whisper, 'tak' aff yer buits!' And he proceeded to unlace his own.

'Eh?'

'Tak' aff yer buits an' ask nae questions.'

'But what's up, Maister McNab?'

'Aff wi' yer buits, or leave this hoose for ever.' Mr McNab removed one of his own and laid it softly aside.

Peter's nervous hands dropped to his feet. Fortunately he was wearing shoes.

'Gosh, but I've an appetite!' muttered Mr McNab. 'It'll be fun to see Susie's face when I tell her I've had ma supper!'

Presently he stood up in his stocking-feet, grinning, opened the oven door, and laid hands on the pie dish. 'Piff! but it's het!' he whispered, wringing his fingers. He tip-toed to the dresser, and returned with a cloth. 'Hurry up, Duff! Ye

should wear sandals.' Removing the pie from the oven, he carried it cautiously to the table. From there he beckoned to the constable, who had at last got rid of his footgear.

Peter came with reluctance. 'Oh, surely, surely ye're no' for eatin' the pie!'

'Wheesht, man! An' ye're gaun to eat yer share.'

'Aw, I couldna, Maister McNab; I——'

'Ye'll eat yer share, ma lad, or, by heavens, you an' me'll cast oot!' Noiselessly he placed a chair in position. 'Gang ower to the dresser an' fetch twa plates—big yins. Haste ye! 'Sh! dinna thump yer feet like that! Dod, but I'm hungry!'

With his large, trembling hands Peter took down a couple of plates. At the same time he dislodged something on the dresser—a large rolling-pin. It acted up to its name and reached the floor with a thump.

'Oh, ye great goat!' the host said savagely.

'Oh, ma taes!' groaned Peter, writhing on one leg.

'Haud yer tongue!' After several seconds of dead silence—'It's a' richt. They didna hear. Come on!' said Mr McNab.

Peter limped half-way to the table and stopped short.

The door opened. Mrs McNab appeared.

'Oh, is that what ye're after, ma man?' she exclaimed, darting to the table and securing the pie. 'An' you a constable!' Turning upon the hapless Peter, she upbraided him until it was apparent that he was too dumfoundered to appreciate her remarks.

'Aw, I think I'd best be gettin' doon the road,' he said weakly, moving toward the door.

'Let him gang,' said Mr McNab. 'It's a' his fau't.'

'Let him gang,' cried Susie, 'in his stockin' soles, an' wi' ma best plates? No' likely!—Stop, constable!' Peter halted. 'An' mark ye this, John'—she raised the pie above her head—'if ye let him gang, I'll drap it!'

Mr McNab turned an awful face upon the young man. 'Stir an inch, an' I'll murder ye!'

While Peter blinked helplessly from one to the other Flora came in.

'Oh, lassie,' said her mother, 'look at the twa o' them! I catched them stealin' the pie, in their stockin'-soles. An' him'—wag-

ging her head at Peter — 'a constable!' She carried the pie back to the oven. Her husband followed.

Flora removed the plates from her lover's nerveless grasp and laid them on the dresser. 'Oh, Peter, is this a' ye care for me?' she said, and, with a sob, ran out.

'John,' said Mrs McNab in a low voice, 'will ye gi'e the man a chance noo?'

'Never! I'll starve first.'

'Weel, I canna hinder ye.' As she passed to the door she gave Peter a little pat on the arm.

Mr McNab threw himself upon his chair and turned his lowering face to the fire.

At the end of a minute the constable gave him a furtive glance, and took a halting step in his direction. In an almost inaudible voice he said, 'Maister McNab.'

'Eh?' said the other, without moving.

'Maister McNab.'

The owner of the name wheeled sharply. 'What the mischief dae ye want?'

'Oh, naething. I jist want—I jist want —Flora.' He recoiled as the other leapt to his feet.

'Guidsake, man! what wey did ye no' say that at first?' Mr McNab dashed

to the door and bawled, 'Here, Flora! Susie! Something's happened!'

Ere they arrived, he was conveying the pie to the table. 'Flora,' he called over his shoulder, 'tak' him! He's yours!'

'Fayther!'

'Weel, weel, you're his! An' the pie, praise Heaven, is mine!'

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THE END.

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